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THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF PROPHECY
ILLUSTRATED AND DEFENDED

IN A COURSE OF

S E R M O N S

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR MDCCC.

AT THE

LECTURE FOUNDED BY JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.

CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY

THE REV. GEORGE RICHARDS, M. A.

VICAR OF BAMPTON, AND RECTOR OF LILLINGSTONE
LOVELL, OXFORDSHIRE; AND LATE FELLOW
OF ORIEL COLLEGE.

De divinatione, quæ est earum rerum, quæ fortuitæ putantur, prædictio, atque præfensio; id, si placet, videamus, quam habeat vim, et quale sit. Ego enim sic existimo; si sint ea genera divinandi vera, de quibus accepimus, quæque colimus, esse Deos.

Cic. de Div. lib. i. sect. 5.

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MICH. MARLOW,
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COLL. DR. JOH. BAPT.
8 Maii 1800.

TO THE HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND
SHUTE BARRINGTON, LL. D.
LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM,
WHOSE ZEAL IN PROMOTING SACRED LITERATURE,
AND FAITHFUL DISCHARGE OF THE DUTIES
OF AN EXALTED STATION,
EFFECTUALLY CONTRIBUTE
TO THE SUPPORT
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION;
WHILE HIS UNREMITTING ASSIDUITY
IN IMPROVING THE CONDITION
OF THE HONEST AND LABORIOUS POOR
ADORNS ITS PROFESSION
AND ILLUSTRATES ITS PUREST PRECEPTS;
THESE LECTURES,
COMPOSED IN ITS DEFENCE,
ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
BY HIS MUCH OBLIGED
AND VERY GRATEFUL SERVANT,

G. RICHARDS.

NEW YORK
PUBLISHER
LITERARY

*Extract from the last Will and Testament of
the late Rev. John Bampton, Canon of
Salisbury:*

—“ I direct and appoint, that the
“ eight Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be
“ preached upon either of the following
“ subjects—to confirm and establish the
“ Christian Faith, and to confute all here-
“ tics and schismatics—upon the divine
“ authority of the Holy Scriptures, &c.—

ENJOY YOUR
COLLECTOR
YEARBOOK

S E R M O N I.

ZECHARIAH vii. 7.

**SHOULD YE NOT HEAR THE WORD, WHICH
THE LORD HATH SPOKEN BY THE FORMER
PROPHETS, WHEN JERUSALEM WAS IN-
HABITED AND IN PROSPERITY ?**

THE prevailing Infidelity of the present times has diverted attention from all inferior considerations, to a defence of the fundamental arguments in favour of Christianity. The subjects, which were once discussed as the most important in Theological warfare, are disregarded, and almost lost, in the momentous contest, to which the Christian champion is now summoned. We no longer strive for the subordinate parts of our Religion ; the whole has been assailed. The controversy is not

confined to a single article of faith, to a few disputed passages in the sacred Writings, or to the particular discipline of a favoured Church. Our adversaries have rejected all articles of faith, have renounced the holy Scriptures at large, and have declared their hostility against the very principle of a Religious Establishment. Arguments the most subtle, and railery the most insidious, have been but too successfully employed in diminishing the effect of the evidences of Christianity, and releasing the mind from the salutary influence of Religion. Though the writings of these daring unbelievers are distinguished by palpable misrepresentations, which the most shameless alone could venture to obtrude, and which the most ignorant alone can be induced to credit; yet they deliver their sentiments with a perspicuity and familiarity, which the meanest understanding may apprehend, with a flow of vulgar pleasantry, which is peculiarly calculated to affect the imaginations of the lower orders of society, and with an authoritative decision, which the scholar only can firmly and effectually resist. The faith even of

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the inhabitants of our own happy country has of late been severely tried by these impious productions. While most of the great kingdoms of Europe have not only been inundated with the pernicious works of the blasphemers ; but in too many instances the people at large have fallen the melancholy victims of the fatal delusion.

But Infidelity has not merely been propagated in the writings of the pretended philosopher with a degree of zeal which is without example ; it has also been adopted as a powerful instrument of ambition : it has fallaciously been proposed to the people of all nations, as one of the principal means, by which they may arrive at an ideal state of liberty which is really impracticable, and of happiness which is really unattainable ; and, in its later stages, it has received a temporary addition of authority and importance, from the splendor of success and the sword of the civil magistrate.

To oppose the effrontery of these numerous and powerful adversaries, and to detect and remove these pernicious errors,

we must recur to the fundamental arguments in defence of our Religion. On all occasions, but especially in seasons like the present, we should more particularly labour to convince the young and the uninformed by statements, which in the judgment of cool and reasonable enquirers may appear irresistible, that Christianity is not an human fiction, but the undoubted Revelation of God. All inferior considerations should in the first instance be entirely neglected ; and the attention should be solely directed to this one momentous truth. When, after a full and candid investigation, it has been deeply impressed upon the mind, the subtleties of the sophist will be vain, and the wit of the scoffer will be heard with indignation or disgust. One decisive testimony in favour of a miraculous interposition, when established beyond the possibility of doubt, must operate upon the mind of the modern Christian, with the same resistless effect, which was produced among the early converts, when they beheld Christ and his Apostles by a word, or by a touch, restoring sight to the blind, and making the lame to walk.

Meta-

Metaphysical discussion, fallacious reasoning, and brilliant wit, have been directed, with uncommon energy, against the preternatural evidences, which establish the divine claims of Revelation. The existence of Miracles, and the truth of Prophecy, have been assailed by every species of attack, which could suggest itself to men, who seem to have been actuated by a spirit of systematic opposition, of hardened prejudice, and sometimes, it is to be feared, even of inveterate malignity.

I shall not, therefore, I trust, undertake an useless or unwelcome office, if I direct your attention to one of the two great preternatural evidences, by which the divine origin of Christianity has been asserted and confirmed.

That men would not be left to the insufficient and treacherous guidance of their own unaided reason, upon the subject of Religion, but that their Maker would afford them additional assistance, and reveal the important truths, upon which their eternal happiness depends, must be allowed,

allowed, by all candid and dispassionate enquirers, to be in the highest degree probable. We are indeed compelled to admit this probability both by our just conceptions of the benevolence of the Creator, and by the urgent wants of the creature, as acknowledged in the modest confessions of the wisest philosophers ^a of antiquity, and demonstrated by the religious ignorance and moral depravity of the whole Pagan world. The history of all nations from which the light of Revelation has been withholden, the prevailing unconsciousness of a superintending Providence, the horrid rites by which they have sometimes been polluted, the corrupt sentiments by which they have always been partially degraded, the errors of principle, and the baseness of practice, which they exhibited, and the cheerless uncertainty, with which, even in ages of science and refinement, they contemplated the prospect of a future world,—these circumstances collectively considered abundantly justify our expectation, and even

^a Plato in Alcibiade ii. Id. in Apol. Socrat. Cic. Tuscul. Quæst. i. i. Plato de Republica, i. vi. See also Clarke's Evidence of Natural and Revealed Religion, sect. 6, 7.
clearly

clearly demonstrate the strong necessity of a divine Revelation.

But it is indispensably requisite, that he, who offers himself to the notice of mankind as the Messenger of the supreme Being, should afford indubitable proofs of the reality of his sacred commission. These proofs must consist of a display of powers, which exceed the utmost possible efforts of mere human ability. He, who acknowledges, that the Almighty was able to create and give order to the whole universe, must assuredly allow, that he is able also, by a miraculous interposition, to suspend that general order in any subordinate part. That he would be induced to suspend it, for the sake of affording a divine sanction to his own gracious Revelation, is a supposition rendered highly probable by the peculiar circumstances of the occasion. In the corrupted state of mankind, even the purest systems of moral and religious instruction must be rendered eminently more effective by the authority of a divine attestation. The inquisitive and the considerate may, not unreasonably perhaps, hesitate to receive it

as the will of the supreme Being, unless it is authenticated by visible proofs of his interposition in its favour. The passions of men are so inordinate, and their depravity so flagrant, that if the truth of a Revelation depended upon assertion alone, the enterprizing and the wicked would often impiously pretend to a divine commission, in order to increase their authority, and promote their worldly designs. Thus unless the real Revelations of the Almighty had been established by proofs of divine perfection, which are raised far above the reach even of the most ingenious artifice, mankind would be constantly perplexed by the claims of contending systems of Religion; and, not being able to afford implicit confidence to any one in particular, might at length become incredulous and indifferent towards all.

A preternatural evidence, therefore, in proof of Divine Revelation, not only may be reasonably expected, but appears to be indispensably requisite.

It has pleased the Almighty to attest the
truth

truth of Christianity by Miracles, and by Prophecy; by a suspension of the laws of nature, which Omnipotence alone could effect; and by a developement of the secrets of futurity, which Omniscience alone could foresee.

To the latter of these evidences I mean to solicit your attention in the following Discourses.

I have already remarked, that, from the unhappy temper of the present times, it is necessary for the Christian teacher to recur to the fundamental arguments in favour of our Religion. It may with equal justice be observed, that, in seasons like the present, the argument from Prophecy in particular is likely to attract a more than ordinary attention, and to make a very strong impression upon the public mind. The ages of great revolutions excite in an uncommon degree the curiosity of mankind. The Christian, on such occasions, is naturally induced to look up with additional reverence to the supreme Being. Unable to assign any adequate human cause for

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the mighty effects which are displayed around him, he recurs to an higher agency. When he is filled with apprehension, he flies to his almighty Protector; when he is blessed with uncommon prosperity, he is animated by gratitude to ascribe the praise to his gracious Benefactor. Knowing that many important transactions of these later ages, involving the interests of Christianity, were disclosed to the view of the ancient Prophets, he is induced humbly to expect the completion of some of the sacred Oracles, in the extraordinary events, in which he bears a part: and thus awakened to a strong sense of divine prescience, in examining the momentous occurrences of his own times, he is prepared to contemplate, with increasing seriousness and a more lively interest, the instances of divine prescience in the times which are past. Peace and security frequently produce a torpor and inaction of the mind. The wonderful revolutions of former ages, which were peculiarly the subjects of Prophecy, are so very different from the tranquillity which then prevails, that they assume in some degree the appearance of fable and romance, and do not

not operate with their full natural force upon the mind. But when changes of an equally high importance are passing dreadfully before our view, we are roused to more energetic conceptions of the revolutions of former times. Kindred ideas and congenial feelings enable us to discern them with quicker perception, and to regard them with keener sensibility ; as he, who has been exposed to the terrors of a tempest on the ocean, listens with more than common earnestness to the recital of the dangers of the mariner.

From these observations it appears, that the wonderful scenes, which have of late been presented to the view of the Christian world, are particularly favourable to the enforcement of the argument from Prophecy, and that they seem to render it more peculiarly incumbent upon us, to place it in that high rank among the evidences of Christianity, to which, from its impressive nature, it is justly entitled, but from which, for a considerable length of time, it appears to have been undeservedly degraded.

To

To this argument very different degrees of importance have been attached, in the several stages of Christianity. Sometimes it has been enforced with imprudent and unjustifiable zeal: sometimes it has been treated with unmerited indifference and even neglect. During one period it has been injudiciously advanced, so as to supersede all other testimonies: during another it has been sunk to a low and unimportant situation among the evidences of the Christian Religion.

In the Apostolic age, the Miracles, which were performed in the presence of the astonished multitude, were sometimes scarcely urged by the first preachers of the Gospel; and the accomplishment of Prophecy was principally employed as the apology of faith, or the instrument of conversion. But let it be observed, that the argument thus distinguished with pre-eminence was solely applied to the Jews. The Jews possessed the prophetic writings: they revered them as divine; and founded upon their own erroneous interpretations of them, their fondest hopes and proudest expectations.

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It was natural, therefore, that the Apostles, in recommending Christianity to them, should accommodate their arguments to the peculiar circumstances of their hearers, and particularly labour to represent it as the full and adequate completion of their national Oracles.

The Gentile world, at the time of the promulgation of the Gospel, was inflamed with a strong desire of exploring the events of futurity. This ardent propensity may be discovered in the writings of the satirists, historians, and philosophers, in the attachment of the people at large to the arts of divination, and in the reverence with which, at Rome, through so long a series of years, the mysterious volumes of the Sibyl had been contemplated. So generally, indeed, did the desire of foreseeing future events prevail, that the Roman empire was overspread with the caves and shady recesses of the pretended prophets. The most illustrious personages were sometimes employed in the prophetic office: while the great body of the people revered the effusions of the priests as the undoubted revelations of the

the gods. Oracles were the chief credentials, which the Heathen produced in supporting the divine pretensions of his superstition: and at the first propagation of Christianity, the public curiosity was excited, and a spirit of enquiry almost universally prevailed ^b, in consequence of the declining authority and gradual cessation of oracles through the whole Roman world. It was natural, therefore, that the early Fathers should avail themselves of the popular spirit; and, exerting their warmest eloquence in support of the prophetic evidence, should appeal to it as peculiarly decisive of the truth and divine nature of the Religion, which they laboured to promulgate. To these observations it may be added, that, from the general belief of the extraordinary influence of magical arts, the result of mere human ingenuity, the knowledge of future times was considered as a surer and more striking proof of Divinity ^c than a suspension of the order of nature.

^b Plutarch. lib. de defect. Orac. Julian. apud Cyrillum. Pliny the elder, &c. &c.

^c Justin. Apol. prima, p. 48. Iren. l. ii. c. 57. Lact. v. 3.

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The first Apologists, therefore, were more willing to rest their claims upon Prophecy, which was the acknowledged inspiration of God, than upon Miracles, which were represented as the effect of magic and a demoniacal agency.

Through the long course of the dark ages, the more important subjects of theology appear to have been totally neglected. The genuine truths of Christianity were buried under a load of corruptions: while the slender portion of literature which still remained, was solely employed in scholastic jargon, metaphysical subtleties, and pertinacious bigotry, collectively exerted in support of the most frivolous and absurd opinions, which it was equally unnecessary and impossible to settle.

At the revival of learning, an enquiry into the genuine spirit of the Gospel was vigorously prosecuted; and the separation from a corrupt Church was attempted with success over a considerable portion of Europe. The advocates of the Reformation resorted to the sacred Scriptures, not only

only for proofs of the gross abuses of the Romish see, and for the establishment of the real doctrines of Christianity; but also for the prophetical delineation of the monstrous corruptions, from which they earnestly struggled to separate themselves. They found among the Prophets the most ample encouragement, not only in the descriptions, which they gave of the spiritual usurpation, but in the earnest and impressive exhortations, which they addressed to the Christian, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins." It cannot, therefore, surprise us, that the enemies of the Papal corruptions, thus deriving from the prophetic writings a considerable authority to their cause, should elevate the testimony of ancient predictions above all other proofs. Perhaps the appeal, which was then made to the authority of the ancient Fathers, might farther induce the theological champion to afford to Prophecy that superiority over all other testimonies, which had been allowed to it by those venerable writers, by whose interpretations of Scripture he fortified his faith in many of the most important doctrines

trines of Revelation. These circumstances, together with an enthusiastic curiosity in developing, by the arts of divination, the secrets of futurity, influenced the character of a part of the Christian world, even through the succeeding ages.

This injudicious and unwarrantable exaltation of a single evidence, the sagacity of our adversaries quickly discerned, and artfully converted to their advantage. They represented our Religion as depending, even for its ^d existence, upon the sole support of Prophecy. And then, with an energy proportionate to their increasing hopes of triumph and final success, they laboured to weaken its authority, by magnifying the difficulties, with which, from its nature,

^d Tindal laboured to prove, that Christianity was founded upon Judaism. Collins, in his Discourses on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion, endeavoured to shew, that Christ and his Apostles founded the divine authority of their Religion solely on the Prophecies of the Old Testament. A passage from the second Epistle of St. Peter (2 Pet. i. 19.) erroneously explained, afforded to the Deists a plausible argument in support of this part of their theory. The sense of this text has been clearly and fully ascertained by Bishop Sherlock. See Sherlock's Discourses on the Use and Intent of Prophecy. Disc. i.

it is in some degree necessarily perplexed ; and which have been considerably heightened by the erroneous explications of ignorant or enthusiastic supporters. The defender of Christianity instantly diverted his attention to other incontrovertible evidences ; and, by a fate to which all human affairs are subject, the argument suffered from abuse, and has not since been generally admitted to that high name and commanding station^c, to which it is unquestionably entitled.

^c If we allow, what cannot, it is apprehended, be fairly controverted, that the testimony of Jesus was the spirit, end, and scope of Prophecy ; we shall not be able to agree with the learned and most able author of Discourses on the Use and Intent of Prophecy, who supposes, that the predictions of the Old Testament were *chiefly* intended to support the faith and religion of the Old World. See Sherlock's Disc. &c. D. ii. p. 37, 38.

Dr. Paley, in his recent publication, the general merits of which cannot be too highly appreciated, has ranked Prophecy among the *auxiliary evidences* of Christianity, has rested almost the whole weight of this testimony upon two predictions, and has confined his remarks to the particular circumstances of the instances which he selected. May I venture to observe, that his valuable work would, perhaps, have been rendered more complete, if he had assigned a higher rank to this evidence, considered it in all its important parts, and afforded to it the advantage of his clear, comprehensive, and forcible method of stating an argument. See Paley's Evidences, vol. ii.

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tionably entitled among the evidences of the Christian Religion.

The friend of sacred Inspiration will surely hesitate, before he consents to assign to the prophetic testimony so degrading a situation. The foresight, with which the ancient Prophets were endowed, was eminently more than human, and was alone abundantly sufficient to establish the certainty of a divine mission. The frequent display of a distant and unerring prescience, at which the unassisted mind of man can never arrive, is a decisive proof of inspiration, and bears upon it the seal of divinity. Miracles and Prophecy are the two great preternatural testimonies, by which the truth of Revelation has been sanctioned. And we may justly contend, that it would be difficult to shew in what respects a series of Prophecies, all of which are acknowledged to be accomplished, is inferior in its effects upon the mind to a series of Miracles, all of which are acknowledged to have been performed. They were both employed in the same holy and momentous cause; they both demonstrate a supernatural interposition; and when we have once confessedly

advanced beyond the limits of human ability, we surely must not venture to affix different degrees of credibility to different displays of Omnipotence. We must bow down with equal adoration before the supreme Being, whether he attests his divine perfection, by discovering a prescience of distant events, which exceeds the knowledge of man; or by performing those wonderful works, which exceed the powers of man. We cannot decisively acknowledge his interference in the one instance, and hesitate equally to acknowledge it in the other. Far be it from me to insinuate, what our injudicious friends and insidious adversaries have not unfrequently in former times asserted, that the truth of Christianity rests solely, or chiefly, upon the evidence, which it will be my object in these Lectures to confirm. While, on the one hand, it is supposed, that the series of predictions, which we possess, is alone sufficient to establish the certainty of a divine Revelation; it may truly be declared, that, had it pleased almighty Wisdom not to have sanctioned his Religion by Prophecy, had not a single instance of divine prescience been admitted into the system of Revela-

Revelation, the Gospel of Christ would still have been supported by a weight of preternatural evidence, from which no candid enquirer could withhold his assent. But in unfolding that wonderful scheme, which has afforded the means of immortality and final happiness to the whole human race, our Maker has graciously doubled the proofs of divinity, and multiplied the sources of conviction. Different minds are influenced by different modes of persuasion. He, for whom Miracles may have been wrought in vain, may be converted by the sure word of Prophecy. Instances have not been wanting in these later ages, in which the dying profligate has been reclaimed from a state of the most stubborn Infidelity, by the authority of the ancient Prophets. And circumstances will fully warrant the supposition, that, in the days of our Saviour, the Jewish people, though they beheld without conviction his wonderful suspension of the regular course of nature, would have prostrated themselves in dutiful submission before their Lord and their God, could they once have been persuaded, that in his divine Person the long train of their national Oracles had received a full completion.

It may not be improper, before I enter upon the investigation of this evidence, to exhort the younger part of my hearers, to endeavour solely in the first instance to arrive at a firm conviction of the reality of a preternatural foreknowledge in the Prophets. When this conviction has once been deeply fixed in the mind, it ought to be allowed constantly to operate with its entire force. We ought frequently to recal to our recollection the principal circumstances, by which it was originally produced, as sure preservatives against the effects of the fluctuation of human opinion, the allurements of novel doctrines, the insidious obtrusion of real or pretended difficulties, and the prejudicial influence of the want of extensive information in all the branches of the subject. Against the force of such a persuasion, rationally produced, it is not unreasonable to expect, that no subordinate considerations will be able effectually to prevail.

It cannot be denied, that the Christian may sometimes encounter very serious difficulties, in consequence of minute researches into the inferior parts of the subject. And, unfortunately for the cause of truth,

truth; the superficial enquirer too often entangles himself with those perplexities, before he has discovered the fundamental principles, upon which the certainty of the evidence depends. But if, in the most important parts, sacred Prophecy indisputably rises above the power of the unassisted human mind, no circumstance of inferior consideration can destroy or weaken the proof of its divinity. Revelation will admit of no compromise. There can be no fellowship between light and darkness. If Prophecy be not in all its parts human, it must be divine. And if the evidence of its celestial origin is really incontrovertible, and irresistibly commands our assent, we are bound, by the common dictates of reason, to repress all suspicion, and to distrust the sufficiency of our own judgments on those points, which may appear unsatisfactory, and may really occasion perplexity.

The obscure and unintelligible nature of some parts of some Prophecies cannot weaken the force of those, which may be clearly understood. The parts, which, from the peculiar nature of the dispensation, are involved in obscurity, or, at present, are

really incapable of a satisfactory application, possess no more influence in the question, than if they had not appeared in the sacred Volume. They neither augment nor diminish the effect of those, which are free from perplexities. Of some inferior parts of the human frame, and of several of the works of nature, we know not yet the use. But we do not, on this account, refuse to acknowledge the intention of utility in others, without the aid of which, existence would instantly cease. We do not withhold our assent from the intelligible and just opinions of an author, because we may be unable to interpret a few difficult sentences in the obscure or mutilated parts of his composition. We decide upon the sentiments which we comprehend, without any reference to the passages which are not understood. In the same manner, the Prophecies, which have received a clear and satisfactory explication, possess their entire force, notwithstanding even the apparently impenetrable obscurity of others.

Whether the Prophets always understood their own predictions, or whether they understood them in a sense different from that

that which was really intended, are considerations totally irrelevant to the question. Our conviction of a preternatural interpolation will be but little aided by discovering, either that the holy Being, by whom the Prophets were inspired, endued them with his own unerring prescience on the subject upon which he employed them, or that he only rendered them the passive instruments of disclosing to mankind his knowledge of futurity. The Christian contends, that they were the agents of a superior Power. If the divine agency is admitted, all which he demands is granted. Every other enquiry may more or less be subject to error and difficulty. By carrying his researches farther, he may gratify a just and pious curiosity; but can derive no advantage essential to the interests of his Religion.

To endeavour to discredit Prophecy by censuring the means, which were used in its delivery, has long been one of the favourite practices of the Infidel. The means have been artfully represented, either as subjects of indecent ridicule, or as ill adapted to the ends, for which they were employed. Such considerations are entirely

tirely independent of the great question. We cannot consistently with reason permit our faith to be destroyed, or even weakened, because the mode, in which the divine foreknowledge of the Prophets was conveyed, was not such as to our finite understanding may appear the most suitable, or the most dignified. We must not deny the reality of an Omnipotent agency, because we approve not of the manner in which it has been exhibited. With equal propriety might we deny, that the great luminary of day was created by the Almighty, because some of its qualities may not accord with our presumptuous determinations respecting such a production of divine Wisdom. With equal propriety might we deny, that the gift of intellect was imparted to man by his Maker, because it may not appear to exhibit that kind or degree of perfection, with which we may arrogantly suppose that such a work of the Almighty must necessarily be endowed. With humble curiosity we may explore all the subordinate parts of the wonderful scene of his Omnipotence, which the sacred Writings lay open to our view : but we should explore them, not for the purpose of

of presumptuously arraigning the wisdom of his measures, and perplexing our minds with useless doubts and suspicions; but with the pious design of acquiring a more perfect knowledge of the nature of his proceedings, in an astonishing act of his Providence, in which we have been previously compelled to admit his divine interference.

In this manner it may be easily shewn, that all the inferior objections, with which the argument from Prophecy has been as-failed, are rendered nugatory and ineffectual, by a clear and decisive proof, that, as far as the peculiar circumstances of the dispensation required, the events fore-told have all actually occurred; and that the Prophets and their predictions were distinguished by numerous peculiarities, which bore the visible marks of a pre-ternatural and over-ruling influence. If in those parts, which are the most important in their nature, and essential to the confirmation of the argument, the Omnipotent Inspirer has abundantly provided for the removal of all reasonable doubts, and for a firm establishment of the truth, we cannot justly expect an equal degree of clearness and

and satisfaction on every other point, which from ignorance or presumption we may labour to explain. While we possess the free and unbiassed exercise of reason, we ought not to renounce that conviction, in consequence even of inextricable difficulties in the inferior parts of the subject, which divine Wisdom may have purposely ordained; which the revolutions of ages, together with the changes of society, manners, and language, may have necessarily occasioned; which the peculiar nature of the dispensation may have inevitably required; or which the pride of human reason, and the arrogant curiosity of man, may have uselessly raised.

Before I quit this part of the subject, let me be allowed to submit to the judgment of the candid and the unprejudiced, one further remark upon the rational and well-grounded persuasion of a divine testimony in favour of Christianity. As it has been already urged, that such a divine testimony ought not to be weakened by the consideration of any particular circumstances attending the inferior parts of the Revelation; so it cannot justly be renounced

nounced in consequence of the arrogant assumptions and plausible theories of the Infidel, and of the pretended Philosopher. It has been the policy of the sceptical writers of the present age, to prejudice the minds of their readers against the proofs of revealed Religion, by fraudulent endeavours to establish, through metaphysical subtleties, fallacious general principles, subversive of all particular testimony. The investigation of the respective evidences has been carefully avoided; while strenuous though ineffectual attempts have been made, to prove the uselessness of a Revelation, the universal prevalence of imposture, the fallible nature of human testimony, the absolute invalidity even of the strongest force of evidence, the influence of our own personal inexperience of supernatural effects, together with the improbability and even the impossibility either of a miraculous action, or of a knowledge of futurity¹. By these specious but delusive theories, our adversaries hoped to prepossess the minds of their hearers, and to harden them against

¹ See *Philosophy of History*, by Voltaire: Article *Oracles*.

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the admission of those incontrovertible evidences, which can be adduced in favour of Christianity. Such a species of attack is peculiarly subtle and insidious: among the weak and the uninformed, it may give birth to doubts and perplexities, which cannot, without long and serious investigation, be effectually removed. But when the Christian has once been convinced by testimonies in themselves unanswerable, drawn from the particular circumstances of the divine manifestation, that there has been an actual display of supernatural power, no speculative opinions, or arbitrary positions, however plausible, ought to shake that persuasion. There is a solid and durable force in real facts, when the proof of them amounts to a moral certainty, against which it is a folly to allow any sophistry to prevail.

As it has already been remarked, that neither real nor pretended difficulties, nor the speciousness of general principles, possess any actual power of weakening the truth of Revelation, against the weight of positive evidence; so it may not be un-serviceable to dismiss from the discussion those

those parts, which are unimportant, and little connected with the general merits of the question. The believer, unintentionally from error, and the Infidel, insidiously for purposes of delusion, have not unfrequently diminished the otherwise irresistible force of the stronger parts of the evidence, by too fully occupying the attention in minute enquiries, which, after the clearest and most satisfactory issue, are in their very nature incapable of powerfully producing conviction. For the purpose, therefore, of preserving the force of the argument unimpaired, and of employing the mind upon objects of the most important consideration alone, it may not be improper to omit all instances of ordinary and inferior Prophecy ; and to confine the attention to those Ministers of heaven, who went forth upon extraordinary missions, and were endued with pre-eminent gifts of prediction. All those modes of pre-science will be excepted from the discussion, which seemed to be adopted for temporary purposes alone, and were solely or principally employed as instruments of theocracy. Thus the Urim and the Thummim were appointed by the Almighty to reveal

veal in certain cases his divine purposes : yet they will be dismissed from our consideration in the following enquiry, because they were never employed in the development of distant events, but were solely intended to direct the immediate proceedings of the Jewish people. The schools of the Prophets appear to have been instituted for the useful purpose of qualifying the priests and ministers of the theocracy for a just discharge of their sacred duties. The more celebrated Prophets were in many instances selected from these pious seminaries. But as the extraordinary degree of inspiration, with which they were gifted, was totally & independent of their connection with such institutions, these schools will not be admitted to bear any part whatever in the general argument from Prophecy.

Upon the same principles, it may not be improper to exclude from the present discussion, except as far as they were illustrative of the principles and conduct of the Prophets, all those predictions, which were

* See Stillingfleet's *Origines Sacrae*, l. ii. c. iv.

more

more particularly delivered in aid of the divine administration in Judea, and received almost an immediate completion. They appear to have been given, in some degree, in compliance with the strong prejudices respecting divination, which then universally prevailed ; and to have been rather an instrument of the theocratic government, than the means of convincing future ages of the extraordinary foreknowledge of the Prophets. In subservience to the peculiar purpose, for which they were principally designed, they partook not so much of the nature of direct and absolute Prophecies, as of promises and comminations, the accomplishment or failure of which was determined by the subsequent conduct of the people, for the benefit of whom they were delivered. Though it may clearly be shewn, that they bear the most visible marks of a divine prescience ; yet, as Pagan countries pretended to a species of divination in some degree similar, and as divine Revelation exhibits a long train of Prophecies, which are more strikingly preternatural, and are much more capable of overpowering the mind with conviction, under the restriction which has

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already

already been proposed, they will generally be omitted in the course of the following enquiries.

The modern enemies of Christianity have disingenuously and basely confounded the various significations which are conveyed by the terms Prophecy and Prophet. To declare ^b to the world the mind of the Almighty, as received by immediate revelation from himself, is the first and highest duty of a Prophet. With this primary meaning of the word, the present argument is not in the slightest degree concerned. It refers only to that species of Prophecy, which was intended as an infallible testimony of the reality of such a divine Revelation. The secondary senses are numerous and varied. They were by no means limited to the display of a real knowledge of futurity. To pretend to divine inspiration, to perform a miracle, to explain the sacred Writings, to deliver moral sentiments, to be convulsed with violent agitations, to assume a poetic character, and even to sing, to dance, and to play,

^b See Stillingfleet's *Origines Sacrae*, B. II. c. v. f. 4.

were

were all promiscuously denominated by the common term of Prophecy. The youthful student cannot too forcibly impress upon his mind these various usages of the word. It may at first appear, perhaps, to some of my hearers, that I stand in need of an apology, for descending to explications, which a common vocabulary affords: but I have been induced to allude to them, in consequence of the unmanly arts, and of the effrontery, with which a confusion of senses, too gross, and too palpable, it is to be feared, to have originated in ignorance, has of late been insidiously adopted by our adversaries, in order to hold up the general evidence of Prophecy to the derision and contempt of the uninformed and the credulous. On occasions like the present, in which an attempt is made to shew the certainty of a supernatural interposition in the instance of Prophecy, the friend of Christianity confines himself to that acceptance of the word, which implies a knowledge of futurity exceeding the reach of any created understanding. The argument is not, in the slightest degree, implicated with any other sense of the term.

These exceptions being made, the enquirer after truth should, in the first instance, solely endeavour to convince himself, that, during a period of an extraordinary interposition of the Almighty in the affairs of a chosen people, certain persons, independently of all local institutions and customary modes of divination, came forth as extraordinary messengers of heaven, and exhibited indubitable testimony, that they were favoured with such a knowledge of future events, as could only be derived from the immediate inspiration of the Deity.

In examining the evidence from Prophecy, the principal force of the argument is found to lie in the firm establishment of the following positions: that, the books containing the predictions being genuine, the Prophecies were severally delivered prior to the time of their accomplishment; and that events have actually occurred, which accurately coincide with the predictions. From a clear and satisfactory investigation of these points, results the most considerable part of that powerful effect, which this evidence is capable of producing.

ducing. But it must immediately occur to every hearer, who is but moderately acquainted with the subject, that the full discussion of these important branches would carry me far beyond the limits, which the nature of these Lectures prescribes. They have frequently undergone the fullest and most satisfactory investigation. I mean, therefore, entirely to omit the consideration of them on the present occasion.

It will rather be my object to direct the attention of the student in sacred literature to the discovery of the most striking characteristics, by which Prophecy is distinguished. Of these characteristics, some are indispensably requisite for the proper support of this testimony; and others, though not absolutely essential, are yet eminently important, and peculiarly calculated to strengthen our confidence in Revelation, and to effect in every candid mind an unalterable persuasion of its truth.

There are various circumstances, which, in tracing Prophecies from their delivery to their completion, must come under the

consideration of the Theological scholar. He renders himself acquainted with the general nature of Prophecy, the conduct and condition of the Prophets, the peculiarities of the several predictions, and the relative situations of the countries and persons concerned either in the delivery, or the accomplishment, together with a variety of important circumstances attending the several pretenders to divine inspiration in heathen nations. This enlarged knowledge of the several parts of the subject will present to his view a number of these characteristics, which, as I have already observed, contribute additional force to the argument, and place in a stronger point of view the divine nature of Jewish and Christian Prophecy. When it has been clearly demonstrated, that there is a coincidence, which it is morally impossible that either chance or human ability could so invariably produce, between the predictions, which were uttered, and the events, in which they were, fulfilled, though, in some instances, the reality of their divine origin does not, perhaps, become actually more certain; yet it is rendered, by a knowledge of these distinguishing marks,

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more striking, and more forcible in producing conviction in the mind. When a simple narrative of facts, establishing an allegation, has been submitted to the opinion of the Jurors, their judgment may be quickened, and their confidence strengthened, by remarks, judiciously made, upon the long train of attending circumstances. What before was indisputable, then becomes more palpably certain.

To this particular part of the subject I propose to limit my enquiries, and shall endeavour to prove,

That the events foretold were frequently REMOTE, were described with MINUTENESS, were sometimes NOVEL, and were very NUMEROUS :

That in the age of the respective Prophets, by whom they were predicted, they must have appeared often IMPROBABLE, and sometimes the exact REVERSE of what might have been reasonably EXPECTED :

That, in numerous instances, the sub-
jects

jects of the predictions were peculiarly UNFAVOURABLE to the WORLDLY VIEWS of the Prophets, and the CONTRARY to those, which, it is reasonable to suppose, IMPOSTORS would have chosen :

That there is a PROPRIETY and CONSISTENCY in all the parts of Prophecy, constituting ONE GREAT AND HARMONIOUS SCHEME, which it seems morally impossible, that the Prophets could have imparted to it, if they had not been really inspired :

That the general CONDUCT of the Prophets is INEXPLICABLE upon HUMAN PRINCIPLES, and can only be satisfactorily accounted for by an acknowledgement of their inspiration :

And lastly, That from the MEANS which they employed, and the END which they pursued, from the circumstances attending the ORIGIN and TERMINATION of sacred Prophecy, and from the PRESENT SITUATION of a considerable portion of mankind, affording a SENSIBLE DEMONSTRATION of the prescience of the ancient Pro-

Prophets, a strong presumptive argument may be derived in favour of their pretensions to a divine Revelation.

Though in the early part of this Discourse I have spoken in general terms of the peculiar force of the evidence from Prophecy, yet it is not my intention to urge it in these Lectures, as a testimony of the Christian Religion. I should occupy too large a portion of your time, if I were to discriminate with the clearness and accuracy, which the nature of the subject requires, between those predictions, which were more particularly intended to authenticate the divine character of Christ and his Religion, and those which were delivered, principally as instruments of the theocracy, during the long course of a miraculous interposition of the Almighty in the affairs of a chosen people. It is boldly and strenuously asserted by the Infidel, with respect to sacred Prophecy at large, that the predictions were delivered for purposes of imposture; and that their completion either was foreseen by human sagacity, or was the fortunate result of chance. To detect the fallacy of this objection, and to shew

shew the certainty of a miraculous prescience in the Prophets, is the sole object, which it will be my endeavour to attain.

The preliminary observations have now been stated, which appeared most requisite, previously to our entrance upon the subject, which is about to be discussed. The necessity of recurring in these times to the principal evidences in favour of Christianity has been strenuously urged. The several degrees of importance have been pointed out, which at different times have been attached to this argument; and the propriety of affording to it the high authority, to which it is unquestionably entitled, has been suggested, and earnestly recommended. The subject has been disengaged from all inferior topics, which either possess no influence in producing a conviction of the divine origin of the sacred Oracles, or cannot reasonably be allowed to weaken that conviction, when it has once been thoroughly produced. And an endeavour has been made to shew by what manner of treatment the argument from Prophecy may be enforced with the fairest probability of success. In my next Discourse

course I shall enter upon the proposed discussion. And with fervour and humility let us implore the high Omniscient Being, whose Revelation we labour to confirm, to prevent us with his most gracious favour, and further us with his continual help.

S E R M O N II.

ISAIAH xlvi. 9, 10.

REMEMBER THE FORMER THINGS OF OLD,
FOR I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NONE
ELSE ; I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NONE
LIKE ME ;
DECLARING THE END FROM THE BEGIN-
NING, AND FROM ANCIENT TIMES THE
THINGS THAT ARE NOT YET DONE.

IT has been asserted by the enemies of Christianity, that no evidence can be sufficiently strong to establish a miracle^a. Though this is a position, to which it is impossible that the impartial enquirer after truth should assent ; yet the testimonies adduced in favour of a preternatural interposition in the affairs of mankind ought

^a See Hume's Essays.

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to be received with caution, and examined with severity. Trifling and unimportant occurrences may, perhaps, be credited upon vague report and the slightest appearance of truth: but our belief ought to be the result of fuller and more accurate enquiries, in proportion as the facts, which claim it, advance in dignity and importance. The farther we may recede from the regular occurrences of human life, and the more extraordinary may be the character, which events bear, with the greater diligence ought we to collect all the proofs which their peculiar nature admits. Their distinguishing characteristics and minute singularities ought to be fully considered, for the sake of suppressing suspicion and confirming faith. We have no inducements to reject the truth of an ordinary event, to which we are familiarised by daily examples, and which the relator has no interest to pervert, or the hearer to credit. But miraculous interpositions, which the weak and the superstitious are naturally disposed to believe, and the crafty and the ambitious are peculiarly interested in feigning, ought to be minutely investigated in all their circumstances, before we afford them

them our unqualified assent. The effect, which is produced in the mind by the knowledge of all the most striking circumstances, is scarcely inferior to that of the positive assurance from an eye-witness of the reality of the fact. On that, which before, perhaps, we were unable to deny, we repose, after such an investigation, with entire and unsuspecting confidence. With respect to the miracles displayed by the holy Founder of our Religion, had we only been informed that, on many occasions, the order of nature was suspended, though we might not have been able to dispute their authority, yet we could not have felt their full and overpowering effect. But when, in addition to the statement of this simple fact, we are told, that the miracles were frequently repeated; that they were performed in open day, before a large and ever varying multitude, and frequently in the sight of inveterate and vigilant enemies; that they were uniformly exerted in the cause of benevolence; that many of the sufferers relieved were publicly known to have been born with their infirmities, and yet were healed in an instant; that the eye-witnesses of these miracles not only persevered,

severed, amidst continued persecutions, in attesting their reality, but even laid down their lives in confirmation of their testimony; and, lastly, that the Religion, for the proof of which such miracles were wrought, in advancing to eminence, triumphed over obstacles, which, without the assistance of miracles, according to human appearances, it was not capable of surmounting; when all these attending circumstances, with many others, which it is unnecessary to enumerate, are added to the plain historical fact, that the laws of nature were superseded, we are over-powered with conviction, and yield to the authority of so manifest a display of Omnipotence.

The peculiar and extraordinary circumstances connected with Prophecy, that other supernatural proof of a divine Revelation, are not less numerous and convincing, than those, from which the authority of miracles receives so considerable an addition of support. It will be my object in the following Lectures, as it has been already stated, to bring the most important of these circumstances successively under our

our consideration. On the present occasion, I shall examine the predicted events, with respect to their REMOTENESS from the time, at which they were severally foretold; to the MINUTENESS and NOVELTY of their distinguishing characteristics; to their NUMBERS; and to their EXACT COINCIDENCE with the previous descriptions of the Prophets.

When powerful principles have begun to operate upon the public mind, and the actors already appear upon the stage, human sagacity, assisted by long experience, may sometimes foresee the consequences with a considerable degree of accuracy. Yet so fluctuating are human affairs, and so sudden the revolutions of society, that even the events of the approaching day, which may frequently be conjectured with success, can never be predicted with certainty. Though free agency is the noble privilege of man; yet, in consequence of the imperfect and corrupt condition of his nature, his actions are often the effects of sudden impulses and of a momentary caprice. Even his most favourite schemes, and the designs, which most truly harmonize with his

natural disposition, are not unfrequently counteracted either by his own perverseness, or by the malignity or the opposing interests of others. Hence we may easily discern the impossibility, as far as human means of prescience extend, of foretelling with any degree of confidence even occurrences probably approaching, which depend upon the voluntary exertions of such an agent.

The impostor, who, like the ministers of Pagan superstition, confines his predictions to his own times, like them must be frequently exposed to error, and thus forfeit all pretensions to divine inspiration. But to look down through a course of ages, and to disclose with accuracy the secrets of a remote futurity, is one of the most distinguishing attributes of Omnipotence. This unattainable excellence of the real Prophets has indeed been seldom attempted by the boldest and most presumptuous pretender to inspiration. The instances are very rare, in which the Prophets of Greece and Rome extended their conjectures beyond the times, in which they flourished. In that interesting treatise upon Divination,

tion, which was composed by the Roman Orator, when he retired from the usurpation of Cæsar to solitude and philosophy, and in which are collected the strongest examples in favour of Heathen Oracles, not a single Prophecy is recorded^b, which reached beyond the ordinary period of human life. It may be presumed, therefore, that a foreknowledge of remote events was in general not even pretended in the system of Pagan imposture. Indeed the priests of that superstition were in general less anxious to afford proofs of their knowledge of futurity, than to display their acquaintance with the events of the passing day, transacted in a remote region, the knowledge of which must have appeared, to their ignorant votaries, to lie far beyond the reach of an uninspired mind.

The Christian dispensation alone can with truth exhibit, among the proofs of its divine origin, the long course of time, through which many of its Prophecies ex-

^b A general expression uttered by an augur (sect. xxii.) respecting the future greatness of Rome, cannot be considered as a reasonable exception to the truth of the observation.

tended. A period, comprising ages, frequently intervened between their delivery and their completion. Many of the most important changes in the East were anticipated in the animated descriptions of the Prophets, even previously to that peculiar disposition of human affairs, in consequence of which they were eventually effected. Some of the most illustrious characters in sacred history, Josias^c, Cyrus^d, the Baptist^e, and the blessed Son^f of God, were promised in the prophetic writings many centuries before their birth. The rise and even the character of ^gnations was predicted, while the Patriarchs yet lived, from whom those nations were to descend. The effect of particular principles was developed, before the principles themselves had been discovered to mankind^h. Thus the benevolent influence of

^c 1 Kings xiii. 2.

^d Isaiah xliv. 28, xlvi. 1.

^e Malachi iii. 1.

^f O. T. *passim*.

^g See the Book of Genesis.

^h To some of the ancient philosophers this circumstance seemed an absolute impossibility. “*Qui potest provideri, quidquam futurum esse, quod neque causam habet ullam, neque notam, cum futurum sit?*” Cicero *de Divinatione*, lib. ii. sect. 6.

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¹ Christianity, and the baleful consequences of the Papal ^k usurpation, appeared in the prophetic Writings, when the world was an entire stranger to an authority like that of the Roman Pontiff; and when doctrines, like those of the Gospel, had never entered into the human mind. Even conditions, which were never to be changed, but were to reach to the end of time, were frequently the subjects of sacred Prophecy. Such were the predictions, which fixed the final doom of Babylon¹, Nineveh^m, and Tyreⁿ; and which determined the unalterable character of the Arabs^o, who were to traverse the deserts; and of the descendants of Ham^p, who were to spread over Africa.

In the instances now selected, it is not possible to conceive, that the predicted events could have come within the verge

¹ See Isaiah and the later Prophets.

^k ² Thessalonians ii. 1—10. 1 Tim. iv. 1—3. Daniel vii. 24, 25. Revelations xiii.

¹ Jérémiah 1. 39, 40.

^m Nahum i. 8, 9. Zephaniah ii. 13, 14, 15.

ⁿ Ezekiel xxvi. 3, 4, 5, 14, 21.

^o Genesis xvi. 12.

^p Genesis ix. 25, 26, 27.

of probability ; and they were altogether unfit for conjecture. So frequently was the attention of the Prophets occupied upon the occurrences of a remote futurity, that this consideration alone essentially contributed to weaken their authority among their contemporaries, and to render their revelations less interesting. And that peculiar circumstance was then urged for the purpose of derision and reproach, which may now be selected as one of the fairest subjects of praise, and one of the strongest arguments for our confidence. "The Visions, which they saw, were for many days to come, and they prophesied of the things that were far off⁴."

With whatever particularity of description the predictions, to which I have appealed, might be delivered, the Prophets have hitherto been considered as expressing the events foretold in general terms alone.

But had sacred Prophecy simply revealed remote events, without marking them by

⁴ Ezekiel xii. 27.

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some of their attendant circumstances, and distinguishing characteristics ; though, upon a candid investigation, the predictions would undoubtedly have appeared to lie out of the reach of human sagacity ; yet by the Infidel they might, with some degree of plausibility, have been wrested to the purposes of scepticism ; and even upon the mind of the sincere and ardent believer, they would not, perhaps, have operated with the immediate and strong conviction, which they are really calculated to produce. General expressions are so accommodating in their nature, and are capable of such varied application, that they may sometimes be hazarded, with a faint expectation of success, even upon some of the most momentous transactions of future ages. Amidst the regular progress of human affairs, the frequent repetition of the same events, and the similarity of effects produced by similar causes, it is not surprising, that conjectures of a peculiar kind, cautiously expressed in general terms alone, should sometimes be apparently justified by the events. In our own times, in which a considerable portion of the western continent, enriched with the most valuable

gifts of nature, and possessed by an active and enterprizing race of inhabitants, has burst asunder the bonds, which united it to the parent state, and erected itself into an independent nation, the philosopher and politician have indulged their speculations, by foretelling, in general terms, the future importance and celebrity of the new-born republic. Their conjectures, it is probable, may be sanctioned by the event. Fourteen hundred years before the birth of Columbus, a Roman poet, roused, perhaps, by the knowledge of remote islands, which had been acquired by his enterprising and successful countrymen, in a beautiful and romantic flight of imagination, enlarged upon the future discovery of a mighty continent, which was concealed beyond the untraversed ocean. The happy fiction of the poet was realized, when the intrepid adventurer conducted his followers

* The following are the words of Seneca :

— venient annis
 Secula seris, quibus Oceanus
 Vincula rerum laxet, et ingens
 Pateat tellus, Tiphysque novos
 Detegat orbes ; nec sit terris
 Ultima Thule.

MEDEA, v. 374.

to

to the other hemisphere. The Roman empire advanced in the course of about six centuries to the meridian of glory, and to universal dominion. The symptoms of its declension soon appeared. In kingdoms, as in the works of nature, the period of decline is often nearly equal to the period which has passed in their progress to maturity. The sagacious augur ⁸, therefore, who could discern the latent but increasing causes of decay, might, without the imputation of rashness, hazard a conjecture respecting the duration of the empire; while the principal circumstance ⁹ attending the augury,

⁸ Seven hundred years after the building of Rome, Vettius Valens, a celebrated augur, asserted, that the twelve vulturs, which appeared to Romulus, portended, that his city should continue through twelve hundred years; one hundred years being supposed to be signified by each bird. This circumstance has come down to posterity, upon the authority of M. T. Varro.

See Censorinus de Die natali, c. xvii. p. 97. See also Hurd's Sermons, v. i. p. 101.

⁹ More than seven hundred years had elapsed since the age of Romulus. A century, therefore, was the only cycle of time, which he could reasonably pretend to have been signified by each bird. He was absolutely excluded from all lesser cycles. And had he proceeded to a longer period, he would, probably, have been obliged to allow a thousand

augury, upon which he founded his fictitious Oracle, appears to have limited him to a particular period of time. He, therefore, boldly declared, that at the foundation of the city it was foreseen by the gods, that Rome should enjoy sovereignty through twelve centuries. At the expiration of the predicted time, the imperial city fell, and submitted to the victorious arms of the Goths.

These, perhaps, are the most remarkable instances recorded in the annals of past ages, of a fortunate insight into the scenes of a distant futurity. But still they are no more than the unassisted efforts of the human mind, and could be effected without the aid of divine inspiration. The expressions are general, and are confined to a single idea. The naked event is alone foretold. Had a variety of the minute and distinguishing peculiarities, which characterize it, been predicted, there would have been that wonderful display of prescience, which, it may justly be contended,

and years for each bird, and thus have rendered the accomplishment of his prediction incredible.

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can only proceed from the immediate revelation of the Deity. Were it now declared, at what precise period the celebrity of America will commence; what will be the distinguishing marks of her greatness; what particular countries she will subdue during her prosperity, and to what individual nation she will in turn submit, when she declines:—or had it been signified by the Roman tragedian, in what age the new hemisphere would be disclosed, what kingdom would render itself illustrious by the discovery, what would be the most remarkable features of the new found continent, and what the consequences to Europe of so vast an accession of territory and riches:—or, again, had the Heathen priest specified the particular nations of the world, who were to be the conquerors of Rome; had he described their language, their persons, their manners, and their arms; had he traced the gradations of their conquests, and marked out the peculiar changes of society, which should take place at the fall of the empire:—in all these instances, by such a minute discrimination of the attending circumstances, the philosopher, the poet, and the augur, would have advanced

advanced far beyond the limits of the human understanding; and might not unjustly, perhaps, have been brought into competition with the favoured Prophets of the Most High.

The author of the *Religio Medici*, a writer whose learning and sagacity have seldom been rivalled by the professors of modern literature, in a short Essay^u indulged his imagination with forming conjectures, under the shape of Prophecies, upon some of the most momentous changes, which to him appeared likely to distinguish future ages. His predictions relate to the probable aggrandizement of North America, of Jamaica among the western islands, and of Batavia in the east, to the triumph of the Turks along the shores of the Baltic, to the emancipation of the nations of Africa from the infamy of foreign servitude, to the discovery of the northern passage to China, and to the union of Venice with the continent. These important conjectures respecting the great changes of future times,

^u See certain miscellany Tracts, by T. Brown, K^t. Tract 12th.

of which it is already evident that some must fail, while a few have received their accomplishment, and others may yet be fulfilled, were all delivered in the most general terms: the expressions refer solely to the one great event; minute discriminations and attending circumstances are entirely omitted.

What we require in vain in the conjectures of uninspired man, is abundantly displayed in the sacred Prophets. In predicting the fate of the great cities of the east, the Prophets foretold, not only the general overthrow of all, but the particular and characteristic ruin of each. Of Tyre^x it was predicted, that the solitary fisherman should spread his nets over the rocks, on which her towers and palaces were raised; of Babylon, that her ruins should bear the appearance of a desolation, occasioned by the overflow of waters; that the sea should come up upon her, and that she should be covered with the multitude of the waves thereof; that she should be

^x Ezekiel xxvi. 14.

^y Jeremiah li. 42. Isaiah xiv. 23.

made

made a possession for the bittern, and for pools of water: and of Nineveh, that she should entirely ² disappear from the earth, and that her situation should no where be found.

Again, in anticipating the great empires of the world, the Prophets did not simply enumerate their regular succession; they marked also their distinct and appropriate features. The Macedonian ^a was pourtrayed by rapidity of conquest, and by the quadruple partition. The Roman ^b was distinguished by a peculiarity of government, a tremendous and irresistible power, uni-

² The entire destruction of this city was clearly and strikingly predicted by Zephaniah. (ii. 13, 14, 15.) But Nahum proceeds even farther than Zephaniah, and in more than one passage strongly intimates, that, in future ages, the place should not be known, on which it stood. (i. 3, 9. ii. 11. iii. 17.) And so complete has been the desolation, that travellers, critics, and historians, cannot agree in fixing the precise spot, on which it was situated. See Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, and Ammianus Marcellinus; Sir John Marsham's Chrón. Sæc. Lucian, the native of a city on the Euphrates, says expressly, that it had utterly perished in his time, and that there was no footstep of it remaining. See Benjamin of Tudela, Thevenot, and Tavernier.

^a Daniel vii. 6. viii. 22.

^b Daniel ii. 40. vii. 7, 23.

versality

versality of dominion, and a final division into ten independent kingdoms.

Of Egypt^c, the lasting monument of divine displeasure, they not only denounced the perpetual servitude, but even expressed the particular infamy of its unceasing subjection to a foreign Prince. Mahomet, the Arabian conqueror^d, if we may venture to give entire assent to the explications of some of the most able interpreters of the Revelations, was described, many ages before his birth, by the fierce countenance, but effeminate hair, and peculiar head-dress of his followers, by the rapidity of his victorious career, by the superior excellence of his cavalry, and by his remarkable anxiety for the preservation of the fruits of the earth, joined to a seeming contradiction of imagery, in the happy comparison of his tribes to a desolating army of locusts. When the Apostle of the Gentiles^e, eager to preserve the disciples of Christ from the corruptions of the Papal see, predicted the rise of that strange and

^c Ezekiel xxx. 13.

^d Revelations ix. 3, 4, 7, 8, 9.

^e 1 Timothy iv. 3. 2 Thessalonians ii. 4, 9, 10.

monstrous

monstrous usurpation, he accurately marked it by some of the minutest traits, which afterwards distinguished that power; the abstinence of its adherents from meats, their renunciation of marriage, their impious pretensions to miracles, and their blasphemous exaltation of a frail mortal, the follower of the humble Jesus, to an equal worship and authority^f with the invisible Lord of heaven and earth. The minute traits of character, which continue to distinguish the tribes of Arabia^g, were revealed by an angel, in the infancy of the world, to the favoured Hagar, when she fled in terror to the wilderness. In examining the awful description, which was given by our Saviour^h, of the destruction of the holy city, we seem to be carried out of the regions of Prophecy, and to peruse the detail of an inhabitant, who had witnessed the overthrow of Jerusalem, and escaped in peril from its ruins. The predictions of Daniel are so full and so mi-

^f 2 Thessalonians ii. 4. For the application of this striking passage to the head of the Romish Church, see Newton on the Prophecies. Diff. xxii.

^g Genesis xvi. 12.

^h Matthew xxiv. Mark xiii. Luke xxi.

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nute, that no single record of the East is sufficient to explain them. Events are more circumstantially stated by the Prophet than by the Historian. So striking, indeed, is the resemblance, which subsists between his Prophecies and the Eastern annals which illustrate them, that the sceptic has been obliged to shelter himself from the force of so irresistible an evidence, by disputing their authenticity, and representing them as forgeries successfully executed subsequent to the events, of which they treated. In the sacred records of the Jews, which consist of almost an uninterrupted series of Prophecies, delivered in one period, and accomplished in another, the Prophets, who were the principal agents employed by the Almighty in the divine government of that people, appear to have been intimately familiarized with the scenes of distant times, and to have looked onward into the future, and back upon the past, with an almost equal degree of minuteness.

But the clearest proof of a preternatural foreknowledge displaying itself in the discovery of minute circumstances, may be derived from the precision, with which the

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Prophets frequently fixed a particular time for the accomplishment of events, even when no human motive could be assigned for their preference of that to any other period. The augur, as we have already seen, was strongly induced, if not absolutely impelled, by the circumstances of the case, to estimate by a particular calculation the duration of the Roman empire. But no necessity or inducement whatever appears to have actuated the Prophets of Israel. Now of occurrences, likely to take place after a short interval, it is highly improbable, that the exact time should be foretold. But to determine the particular years, in which very remote events, the causes of which have not yet begun to operate, will be brought to pass, cannot be attempted with any reasonable hope of success, and may almost be pronounced impossible. Instances have not been wanting, in which a precise period was determined for the accomplishment of a particular event. An ancient ¹ Father of the Church has recorded a fictitious Oracle, which ventured to limit the duration of

¹ Augustin. de Civ. Dei, lib. xviii. cap. 53.

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Christianity to a definite period of time^k. The appointed space soon elapsed: and our holy Religion has since continued to flourish through more than a thousand years. The authors of the Sibylline verses represented the ruin of Rome as certain to be effected in a particular^l year; beyond which, however, the city long remained the capital of the empire, and the seat of the imperial residence.

The sacred Prophets alone have been able to mark their productions by this decisive proof of inspiration. Thus a period of four hundred^m years was named for the sojourning of the people of Israel in Egypt; seventy forⁿ the temporary punishment of Tyre; seventy for^o the captivity of the Jews in Babylon; and four hundred and ninety for^p the interval between their return to Jerusalem and the appearance of their expected Messiah. The time fixed for the continuance of the Papal usurpa-

^k Three hundred and sixty-five years.

^l The year 195 of the Christian era. See Gibbon's Hist. vol. i. p. 618.

^m Genesix xv. 13.

ⁿ Iisaiah xxiii. 15.

^o Jeremiah xxv. 11, 12.

^p Daniel ix. 25, 26.

tion is still more extraordinary, because it is much more extended. The most able interpreters of the sacred Scriptures have limited it to twelve hundred and sixty years, upon the concurring testimony of Daniel and St. John. The severe shocks which it has received, and the weakened condition in which we now behold it, justify the supposition, that the period of its duration, no less than the characteristics by which it has been distinguished, will be found faithfully to coincide with the descriptions of the Prophets.

It was the chief intention of the Jewish Prophets, and of the founder of the Jewish dispensation, to prepare the way for the Messiah, by completely foreshewing his most wonderful actions, and the most minute discriminations of his character. Innumerable events were foreshewn, too unimportant perhaps in themselves to have deserved notice, even in the history of that exalted Personage; but deriving an inestimable value from the additional confirmation, which they afford to his divine pretensions, as the completion of ancient Prophecies.

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A celebrated poet of antiquity, who has rarely been exceeded in genius, and never perhaps even equalled in judgment, in the great work which immortalizes his name, has afforded a striking instance of the most exalted conceptions of the human mind, respecting the perfections of the divine nature, in revealing the events of futurity. But this perfect example of a supposed display of Omnipotence is undoubtedly surpassed in the real Revelations of the Most High.

In the highest and most flourishing state of Roman grandeur, he produced his sublime composition. It was his principal object to celebrate the glories of his country, and to do honour to his imperial patron. He selected his fable from the uncertain records of remote antiquity ; and, by the happy artifices of poetic anticipation, he embellished his work with all the most splendid events, which had distinguished his country and his emperor. The effusions of Prophets, typical characters, the revelations of superior beings, and an introduction by visions into the imaginary scenes of other worlds, were all successfully employed to shadow forth the future

triumphs of Rome, and the fame of her citizens. Every important event was minutely discriminated. And it may be instantly discerned upon perusal, that the poet was intimately acquainted with the occurrences of many successive ages subsequent to the times of his hero. As he spoke only of events, which had passed before the period, in which he flourished, our admiration is excited by the happy skill, with which he introduced into his poem such an interesting variety of fancied predictions. Let us now suppose, that the same work, without the variation of a single passage, had appeared soon after the arrival of Æneas in Italy, or at the founding of the city by Romulus: let us suppose, that the changes of government in Rome, the most celebrated victories, the nations subject to the Roman power, the universal dominion of the city, the distinguishing characteristics of the most renowned chiefs, and the character of Augustus in particular, had all been pourtrayed with minuteness and accuracy, in the very words, which Virgil has adopted;—surely we should not have hesitated to pronounce such a work to exceed the ability of the human intellect, and to

to be a manifest display of celestial inspiration. What, under these circumstances, we should have regarded as divine in the heathen poet, we are bound to receive as such in the holy Scriptures. The history of the Jewish nation seems but a secondary object in the sacred records of that people. The display of a miraculous prescience in a continued developement of the future, forms the striking and prominent feature of that wonderful history. It might without difficulty be shewn, that the pretended anticipations by Virgil, of events, which had already passed, were neither so numerous, so particular, nor so intimately connected with every extraordinary action recorded, and every eminent character described, as the real Prophecies delivered in the sacred Writings. The character of Augustus, typically represented by *Æneas*, and brought forward, in the course of the poem, on every favourable occasion, is not so fully nor so accurately pourtrayed, as the prophetic picture of our Saviour: it is not equally visible in every part, it does not equally animate the whole production. Every eminent action, every celebrated personage, the whole system of the national

polity, and even the most unimportant parts of the religious ceremonies of the Jews, all partook of the prophetic character, were predictive of futurity, and the shadows of better things to come.

This accurate detail of minute circumstances attending a remote event, it may boldly be declared, lies far beyond the reach of the unassisted human intellect. When we behold such a Prophecy fulfilled in all its lesser parts, we acknowledge the interposition of an Omnipotent Being, and feel at once an irresistible conviction. No further proof is necessary, or can reasonably be expected. The accession of stronger evidence appears to be hardly within the bounds of possibility. Yet upon the awful subject of divine Revelation, our full assent to which is indispensably requisite for the attainment of eternal happiness, the Almighty has graciously multiplied the sources of conviction, and left the incredulous without the means of excuse. Many of the predictions are altogether novel in their nature. What in all the variety of human affairs has never occurred, cannot, without a considerable degree of hesitation,

tion, be admitted even by the speculative philosopher into the number of future possibilities. Its probability must be altogether denied. What then shall we think of those men, who predicted the positive occurrence not only of a variety of future events, of which the time, the place, the agents, and the precise disposition of human affairs, under which they would severally come to pass, were accurately marked, but of events, which were without example? Surely we cannot refrain from ascribing such instances of foreknowledge to the only cause which is capable of producing them, the immediate inspiration of the Deity.

The drying up of the waters of one of the largest rivers which flow through the earth, must surely rank in the number of the most novel events, and must be acknowledged to lie far beyond the reach of human sagacity or prescience. Yet it was predicted in the plainest and most distinct terms by Isaiah and Jeremiah ^a.

The present condition of the Jews, upon

^a Isaiah xliiv. 27. Jeremiah I. 38. li. 6.

which

which I shall have occasion to enlarge more fully in a future Lecture, in many eminent circumstances is unexampled in the history of mankind. Yet the Prophets predicted the existence of such a peculiar state of society, expressly named the people among whom it should take place, and described the particular period of their history, in which the singular prediction should be accomplished.

It must have been observed by the most superficial enquirer into the annals of past ages, that no power similar to that of the Papal usurpation has ever obtained the ascendancy over a considerable portion of the globe. Yet that usurpation was prophetically anticipated in full and express terms by St. Paul^s and St. John, some ages before its own commencement; and at an earlier period still by Daniel, before the commencement of the religious system; upon the perversion of which it founded its impious pretensions.

¹ Deut. xxviii. xxix. Daniel ix. 26, 27. and the three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

² 1 Timothy iv. 1, 2, 3. 2 Thessalonians ii. 3—12. Revelations xvii.

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The Prophets of ^t Israel break forth into expressions of the most rapturous exultation upon the prospect of a future Revelation, which should be made to all the earth, and be received by the whole human race. This wonderful Revelation has been graciously imparted. Its divine claims have been admitted over a considerable portion of the globe. Accessions are daily made to the number of its followers in new regions and unknown climes, the future seats perhaps of science and dominion. And the full completion of the Prophecy appears to be more easy and probable than the partial accomplishment, which has already taken place. Now an universal Religion, so far from having ever been admitted among mankind, had not entered into the imagination of the most sanguine and romantic speculist. The ancient lawgivers, who were frequently the inventors of new religious systems, adapted them each to his own polity, and neither endeavoured nor wished to extend their influence to independent governments, or even to the neighbouring kingdoms. The philo-

^t Isaiah more particularly, and the later Prophets.
sophers,

sophers, who were the founders of ancient sects, conscious of the insuperable difficulty of controuling the varied opinions of mankind at large, did not expect to unite even their own countrymen in the belief of one common system of philosophy. The Romans, who established their fame upon the subjugation of the persons of all mankind, attempted not to destroy their freedom upon sacred subjects; but, fearful of the hazardous experiment, generally permitted the inhabitants of the enslaved provinces to preserve the religious worship, which they had cultivated during the period of independence and security.

In the character of the blessed Jesus, as described by the Prophets, there are many circumstances of a very peculiar kind, with which no person had previously been marked, and which have never since distinguished an human being. His miraculous ^u conception, his ^x resurrection, the spirituality ^y of the new covenant, and the

^u Isaiah vii. 14,

^x Isaiah liii. 10, 11. Psalms xvi. 10, 11, et alibi. Hosea xiii. 14.

^y Jeremiah xxxi. 31, 32, &c. xxxiii. 8.

ipward

inward efficacy of his laws, the apparent contradictions in his character, the universal benefit of his ^a death, and the astonishing influence of the Holy ^b Spirit, with numerous other circumstances predicted of himself, and of his kingdom, were novel in their kind, and had not even occurred to the imagination of the most daring theorists. It is not, perhaps, unworthy of remark in this part of the subject, that crucifixion, the peculiar kind of death predicted of the Messiah in the clearest terms by David ^c, was a mode of punishment entirely unknown among the Hebrews in the days of the Psalmist, and was first introduced into Judea, after an interval of a thousand years, by the Romans.

It would not be a difficult task to exhibit a variety of other instances, in which the circumstances predicted were not only distant and minute, but also without example. But those, which have been already adduced, are abundantly sufficient

^a See the 53d chapter of Isaiah, and the Psalms *paffim*, more particularly the 27th and the 110th.

^b Daniel ix. 26. Isaiah liii. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12.

^b Joel ii. 28—31.

^c Psalm xxii. 16.

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for the establishment of this branch of the argument.

Before this part of the subject is closed, it may be useful to observe, that the holy Scriptures contain numerous Prophecies, which are distinguished by one or other, or by all the characteristics, which have just been considered. It is not in a few solitary predictions, extracted from a large collection, that these striking marks may be found. They abound universally. They are so numerous, and are mingled so intimately together, that, like the stars which shine in the heavens, they cannot accurately be numbered. A single coincidence, even under such peculiar circumstances, in the infinite variety of human chances, might perhaps have casually occurred: and the ingenuity of man might occasionally be able, without any violent injury to the sense, plausibly to accommodate a few solitary predictions to some succeeding events. But many Prophecies marked by such minute and striking distinctions, when faithfully accomplished, exhibit incontestable proofs of divine prescience, which cannot be resisted. I do not

not mean to assert, that in proving the divine origin of Prophecy, numbers simply imply a supernatural agency. The fallacious predictions of the Pagan Oracles were innumerable. The pretended miracles of the Romish church exceed all calculation. But it is maintained by the Christian, that, if Prophéties, containing the strongest internal evidence of a knowledge more than human, have been frequently delivered, numbers in such a case become a strong additional proof of the certainty of a divine interposition. It cannot be conceived possible, that, where there is that union of attending peculiarities, which has been already described, either chance or human sagacity can often produce so exact a coincidence between the Prophecy and the event, by which it is completed. Frequency under such circumstances must carry the force of demonstration.

But this part of the argument is capable of a statement even more forcible. We may confidently assert, not only that in many instances the event has corresponded with the Prophecy, but that almost every prediction has been verified. With a limitation,

tion, which is very slight, and which we shall have occasion to examine in a future Discourse, all the predictions uttered in the course of divine Revelation, of which the time of completion has passed, and which constitute almost the whole number delivered, have received their full accomplishment. It was the severe and just remark of the Roman philosopher upon the pretended divination of Heathen antiquity, that though some of the Oracles had been casually sanctioned by a seeming completion, yet that far the greater number had been contradicted by subsequent events. The character of Scripture Prophecy in this important particular rises above all comparison. In the sacred Volume containing innumerable predictions, which from its first publication has been generally considered through all subsequent ages as the repository of divine inspiration, all the predictions have been realized. It is not that many have succeeded, but that not one has failed.

From the present enquiry it appears, that the sacred Writings contain a great variety of predictions, which were delivered long before

before their accomplishment, of the particulars of which many were circumstantially delineated, and some were novel in their kind. In numerous instances these predictions were applied by the Prophets themselves, at the moment of delivery, either nominally, or by distinguishing characteristics, which cannot be mistaken, each to the particular person, place, or nation, to which they were respectively intended to refer. Of those, which are not so circumstantial, the application is in general equally just, though, perhaps, not equally palpable and striking. No Sceptic will be hardy enough to deny, whatever he may suppose of the real intention of the Prophets, that most of them are capable of being referred each to some one particular subsequent event, and in general to no other. Now it is contended, that such a coincidence is a proof of a divine origin. The fitness implies a design. It is not in the course of human contingencies, that in a single composition, professedly predictive, a great number of passages, if they had really been written without any determinate meaning, should correspond, in

a very exact and striking manner, with the events of future ages.

The celebrated leader of Infidelity ^a in France, and many of the Sceptics of our own country, have earnestly laboured to reduce the predictions of the sacred Writings to the calculation of chances. But their theories have been in direct opposition to the common dictates of reason, as well as to the uniform experience of all past time. Let any other history be taken; let any collection of pretended Prophecies be examined; and let a trial be made, whether they can be forced, by the most violent constructions, to correspond in any degree whatever with succeeding events. The enemies of Christianity have been at all times sufficiently active: and were it possible to weaken by such means, even in the slightest degree, the influence of the argument from Prophecy, the attempt would undoubtedly have been made. The Deist has repeatedly laboured to confound Christian Prophecy with the Oracles of the

^a See Philosophy of History: article *Oracle*.

Heathens. But an attack like that, which we are now supposing, even our most daring and shameless adversaries have never ventured to attempt. It is impossible that it should be attended with the slightest appearance of success. Of an uniform
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* The following passage from Cicero de Divinatione upon the powers of chance, though fallaciously urged as a proof of the divine nature of Heathen Oracles, may in the justest and fullest sense be applied to the striking circumstances at present under our consideration in Christian Prophecy.

“ Quid quæris, Carneades, cur hæc ita fiant, aut qua arte perspici possint? Casu, inquis. Itane vero? Quidquam potest casu esse factum, quod omnes habet in se numeros veritatis? Quatuor tali jaæti casu Venereum efficiunt; num etiam centum Venereos, si 400 talos jeceris, casu futuros putas? Adspersa temere pigmenta in tabula, oris lineamenta effingere possunt; num etiam Veneris Coæ pulchritudinem effingi posse adspersione fortuita putas? Sus rostro si humi A literam impresserit; num propterea suspicari poteris, Andromacham Ennii ab ea posse describi? Fingebat Carneades, in Chiorum lapicidinis saxo diffisso caput extitisse Panisci. Credo, aliquam non dissimilem figuram, sed certe non tam, ut eam factam a Scopa diceres. Sic enim se profectores habet, ut nunquam perfecte veritatem casus imitetur.” Lib. i. sect. 13.

This agreement would undoubtedly have been conclusive in favour of the inspiration of Heathen Oracles, had *all* the predictions been fulfilled; whereas from the general history of Oracles, as well as from the authority of Cicero in this

correspondence in so many instances, we need not hesitate to assert, that where it exists, it cannot be the result of accident; and where it does not exist, it cannot, by the most ingenious and laboured efforts of art, be plausibly made to appear.

For the purpose of rendering the present argument still clearer and more forcible, let us suppose that the general attention was now for the first time directed to a series of maps, in which were marked out many great and splendid cities, their gates, their temples, their palaces, and their castles, their principal streets, the rivers that flow through them, and in many instances even the smaller and more obscure avenues. Let it be supposed, that such a collection was presented to public view, without a single explanatory sentence; that the contents were examined by men, who possessed an extensive knowledge of foreign countries; and that they unanimously agreed in applying the several

very treatise, it is evident, that they *most frequently* failed. On the contrary, as it has been already shewn in this Lecture, the Christian Prophecies invariably received a completion.

maps,

maps, each to some particular metropolis: should we not immediately conclude, that such a resemblance was intended; that it could not be the effect of chance, and that the author purposed to describe the several cities, the descriptions of which are respectively given? It is not possible that any reasonable enquirer can entertain a doubt upon the subject. Such in general is precisely the case with respect to Jewish and Christian Prophecy. The coincidence of the sacred Oracles with subsequent events is equally striking, bears as evident marks of design, and is abundantly sufficient to establish, beyond the possibility of doubt in every reasonable mind, the divine inspiration of the Prophets.

S E R M O N III.

DANIEL ii. 10, 11.

THERE IS NOT A MAN UPON EARTH THAT CAN SHEW THE KING'S MATTER: THEREFORE, THERE IS NO KING, LORD, NOR RULER, THAT ASKED SUCH THINGS AT ANY MAGICIAN, OR ASTROLOGER, OR CHALDEAN.

AND IT IS A RARE THING THAT THE KING REQUIRETH. AND THERE IS NONE OTHER THAT CAN SHEW IT BEFORE THE KING, EXCEPT THE GODS, WHOSE DWELLING IS NOT WITH FLESH.

IN order to prove the divine inspiration of the Prophets, it is indispensably necessary to shew, that the events predicted were of such a kind as to lie entirely out of the reach of the natural foresight of man. I have already observed, that human sagacity, assisted by long experience, may arrive at a very considerable degree

of excellence in discovering consequences, which a common mind is altogether incapable of discerning. Let an accurate observer study the passions of man, and the history of the human race; let him accustom himself to trace events from their first causes, to their most remote effects; let him penetrate the latent policy of the nations which lie around him, with the power which they possess of giving efficacy to their designs:—he may at length be enabled sometimes to unveil the scenes of distant times, which are concealed from general view, and to predict a variety of events, some of which, depending upon causes subject to his speculation, will occur in their proper season, and seemingly sanction his pretensions to a knowledge of futurity. Hence the person most skilful in conjecture was represented by the Greek tragedian ^a as most worthy of the name of Prophet. And in the spirit of the same principle, according to the annals of antiquity,

^a Μάρτις δ' αριστος, οστις εικαζει κατως. EURIPIDES.

Thus translated by Cicero :

Bene qui conjiciet, vatem hunc perhibebo optimum.

De Divinatione, lib. ii. sect. 5.

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a species of divination was supposed to reside in Thales, the Milesian philosopher, and Epimenides, the poet of Crete. From this source also was probably derived the opinion, prevalent among all nations, that men at the approach of death are sometimes endowed with the gift of Prophecy. And hence the experience of age has been represented as bearing a distant resemblance to the strain of the Prophet.

The enemies of Christianity are fully sensible of the weight, which is due to an objection drawn from this source. They have represented the sacred Writers, as men endowed with a keen discernment, and capable of foreseeing very remote consequences. They boldly suppose them to have risqued a variety of probable predictions, some of which, being thus founded upon an intimate knowledge of the natural course of human events, have been accomplished; while others, which were hazarded upon groundless conjecture alone, continue without application, and are silently neglected.

Too severe a wound might be given to
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the feelings of the pious Christian, were I to lay before him the expressions of impious levity, with which this artful objection has been repeatedly enforced. The danger, however, to which our Religion is exposed by such a mode of attack, is alarming in a very high degree. Though the Theologian may instantly discern the falsehood of the assertion, the weakness of the argument, and the indecent scurrility of the language; yet the ignorant may be deceived, the gay may be dazzled by the vivacity of the thought, and the superficial may be misled by the speciousness of an objection, the futility of which they possess not the ability to discover. In this age of daring Infidelity, when our adversaries, casting aside all sense of decorum and manly ingenuousness, for the sake of adapting their objections to the capacities of the inferior orders, have proceeded in open defiance of truth and honest argument, it becomes us to be doubly vigilant, and not only to enforce the evidences of Christianity, but to enforce them in such a manner as may best be calculated to oppose the particular mode of attack adopted by the modern Sceptic.

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In order to expose the futility of the objection just stated, it is absolutely necessary to prove in a variety of important instances, that the events predicted by the sacred Writers were removed far beyond the reach of human foresight, and could never have been selected as fair subjects of ingenious conjecture by impostors. In my last Discourse I endeavoured to shew, that these events frequently occurred in an age long subsequent to that of the Prophet, were circumstantially described, were frequently novel, were very numerous, and aptly coincided with the prediction. Through the following Discourse it will be my object to prove, that, in many of the most important Prophecies, the occurrences foretold must, from their peculiar character, be universally and instantly acknowledged to have been indiscernible during the age of the Prophet; and that in others they were the very REVERSE of what a judicious deceiver, judging from the appearances before him, would have supposed LIKELY TO TAKE PLACE.

On the days immediately preceding the
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crucifixion, our blessed Lord disclosed with clearness and accuracy, which nearly resemble the detail of the historian, many of the most memorable circumstances, with which the siege of Jerusalem would be attended. The astonishing foresight, which he manifested, by describing the signs, the manner, and the exact time of the destruction of the holy city, must, if maturely considered, overpower the mind of the Christian with wonder and conviction. But the circumstance, which perhaps most effectually raises this prediction above all suspicion of its being the result of human sagacity, is the entire destruction which it represented as awaiting the vast edifice of the Temple. "Before this generation pass away," said the holy Founder of Christianity, when he beheld the magnificent pile, "not one stone shall be left upon another." Even if we suppose, what must only be supposed for the sake of the argument, that the conquest of Jerusalem could be conjectured from the prevailing spirit and circumstances of the times; yet the total destruction of the Temple was not the necessary, or even the probable, consequence of such a calamitous event. Its preservation would rather have been

been the theme of a sagacious pretender to Prophecy. I will not here insist upon the strength of this fortress, both natural and artificial, which the Jewish historian has represented as one of the most ^b impregnable which had ever been erected in the world. Even the conqueror, surveying it in ruins, and discovering that it could not, if skilfully defended, have been shaken by military engines, nor stormed by the most intrepid host, acknowledged the absolute incompetence of the human instruments, and ascribed its demolition to the manifest interference of God ^c. Independently of these considerations, it must have been evident, in the age of our Saviour, that, whatever might be the fate of the city and of its inhabitants, in consequence of the stubborn hostility of the Jews, and the invertebrate fury of the Romans, it would be the common object, both of the victors and the vanquished, to save this venerable building from destruction.

The Jews, trusting in their own mistaken interpretation of the ancient Pro-

^b Josephus, b. v. 14:

^c Josephus, b. vi. 43.
phets,

phets, considered their Temple placed under the immediate protection of the Almighty, as secure from mortal violence, and immovable as the ground on which it stood ^d. So infatuated were they by this blind confidence, that, when their city was given up for plunder to the legions, they rushed, secure of safety, into the burning isles of the Sanctuary, and thousands perished in the ruins.

If we examine the annals of the Romans, we shall discover, that, during the period of their grandeur and prosperity, which long preceded the fall of Jerusalem, when the spirit of rivalship no longer prevailed, which in the earlier ages of the republic had occasioned the destruction of Corinth, Carthage, and Numantia, it was the custom of that great people to preserve entire the stupendous monuments of their victories. The chief cities of the conquered kingdoms were permitted to flourish as tributaries of Rome. The works of elegant art alone, with which they were enriched, were carried away to.

^d Philo de Monarch. p. 821. Vit. Mos. ii. p. 656.
grace

grace the triumph of the general, and adorn the capital of the empire. Thus Alexandria, the emporium of Egypt; Athens, the seat of science; and the splendid and opulent cities of Asia Minor, continued entire after their subjugation, and contributed to the glory and prosperity of their conquerors. In addition to the above argument, let it be remembered, as another strong reason for the probable preservation of the Temple, that it was the uniform policy of the Romans to respect the religious prejudices of the conquered countries. So accommodating were their maxims of universal toleration, that within the regions of Palestine, in compliance with the wishes of its inhabitants, they even lowered their imperial eagles, and desisted from their design of erecting the statue of the Emperor in the sanctuary of Jehovah. So powerful was the influence of this principle among their commanders, at the period of which we are speaking, that the illustrious chief, who conducted the siege of Jerusalem, manifested a most ardent anxiety for the preservation of the Temple. At the commencement of his military operations, he repeatedly solicited

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the Jews to save the magnificent building; and again, at the storming of the city, when a brand had been thrown within the pile by the hand of a soldier, he instantly commanded his legions to extinguish the flames. It was natural, therefore, to suppose, that, even under the most extraordinary and desperate circumstances, they would be induced, in conformity with their usual principles of toleration, to preserve the Temple of Jerusalem.

From these considerations it must necessarily be inferred, that to a Jew, during the reign of Tiberius, the demolition of that sacred edifice must have appeared absolutely impossible: and, even if its possibility had been admitted, that its demolition by a Roman army must have appeared singularly improbable, as that people seemed to be engaged by the strongest motives to favour its preservation.

In passing from the consideration of sin-

^e The Romans were marked out with a considerable degree of precision by our Saviour: and it was evident, that they were the only people in the world likely to contend with the Jews before the passing away of that generation.

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gle edifices to that of the imperial cities, our astonishment will be still more powerfully excited, by the extraordinary subjects of some predictions so opposite to those, which an impostor would have been induced to select. When Nineveh and Babylon, those mighty seats of empire, the pride of early ages, and the wonder of all succeeding times, had advanced to the highest state of greatness and splendour, the most striking pictures were drawn by the Prophets of their overthrow and desolation. The entire destruction of two cities eminently the most formidable which have ever appeared in the world, was in the highest degree improbable. Much, undoubtedly, may be conjectured by the speculative mind, from a knowledge of the revolutions of empires, and of the instability of human grandeur: but vast capitals, overflowing with inhabitants, and enjoying dominion over a considerable portion of the earth, must have appeared to the spectator, who gazed in astonishment upon them, to be exempted from the general lot, and to be raised above the reach of fortune and mortal decay.

In those early periods of society, the Prophet could not have been emboldened by similar examples, collected from the varied histories of nations. Cities, possessed of small power, and of a limited territory, might, in the time of the Prophet, have been subverted in war, or have silently sunk into ruin: but no instance had then occurred, in which the metropolis of a mighty empire, or even of a great kingdom, had been rooted up from its foundations, and had totally disappeared from the earth.

Even had the Prophets been gifted with a knowledge of the fortunes of all the great cities, which were in future to appear, they would by no means have found, that they all terminated in that complete destruction, with which Nineveh and Babylon were threatened. Though spoiled of their grandeur, and deprived of their authority, they have generally continued to exist, and have exhibited, even in their fallen state, the monuments of their former magnificence. Athens, Alexandria, and Constantinople; Bagdat, the pride of the Saracens; and Rome, the mistress of the world; these, and

and many other places, once splendid and glorious, have survived the empires, over which they presided, and still occupy the rank of cities.

But whatever may be the final condition of great capitals in general, the peculiar character of Nineveh and Babylon must have appeared to exempt them from the common doom. Their vast extent, the means of annually raising a great store of provisions within their circumference, the enormous height and bulk of their gates, towers, and walls, and the gigantic appearance of their sacred edifices; all these seemed to give them means of duration eminently beyond what have been enjoyed by any other city. They appeared to be rooted, like mountains, to the soil, and to be unmoveable but by some violent convulsion of nature. Under these peculiar circumstances, how opposite to all, which human artifice would have uttered, were the expressions of the Prophecy, which doomed those cities to complete and final destruction !

Though this total demolition was an

event, which no man could reasonably expect ; yet the particular species of ruin, which was predicted to Babylon, must have appeared even more improbable. They were both situated upon the side of great rivers ; yet the desolation foretold to the one was of that peculiar species, which is occasioned by the overflow of waters ; and that of the other was entirely independent of the stream, by which its walls were washed. In exact conformity with the expressions of the Prophet, the ¹ traveller now wanders in vain along the banks of the Tigris, in search of the ruins of Nineveh : whilst within the broken arches and rifted walls of Babylon ², buried in filth, and loathsome with infection, where the foot of man seldom treads, the deadly serpents hiss, and the owl and the bittern inhabit. There the Arabian never pitches his tent, nor does the shepherd make his fold : but wild beasts of the island cry in the desolate houses, and dragons in the pleasant palaces. And let it be remembered, that the means, without which

¹ Nahum i. 8, 9. ii. 11.

² Isaiah xx. 20, 21, 22. Jeremiah 1. 39.

this

this city could not have been reduced to its present peculiar state of ruin, must have been placed entirely out of the reach of human foresight. It was occasioned by an enterprize perhaps the most wonderful which history records, the turning of a great river from its channel, and the deposition of its waters in a vast artificial basin. The stream was never again confined entirely within its natural bed ; and the vapours engendered by its stagnation in the surrounding plains and marshes, drove away the sickening inhabitants, and thus gradually dispeopled the city.

If the complete and lasting desolation of a great city cannot be foreseen by human sagacity, still greater must be the difficulty of foretelling the permanent debasement of a powerful and extensive territory. Yet Ezekiel declared, in the most express terms, that the kingdom of Egypt should no more be governed by its own native princes, but should sink for ever into the basest and most servile condition. More than two thousand years have now elapsed since this Prophecy was delivered to the world. The fortune of kingdoms

bears a striking resemblance to the fortune of individuals. The fluctuations of adversity and prosperity may be equally observed in both. There is not, perhaps, a spot upon the globe, of which, looking down through the long succession of time, and contemplating the capricious reverses of fortune, we might venture to declare such a continued humiliation, as that which the Prophet pronounced against Egypt. Even the unfruitful marshes of Batavia have risen to opulence, distinction, and power. While upon the small and barren islands in the Adriatic, whose tops scarcely rise above the waters, the Venetians erected a power once formidable throughout the world, which the united efforts of nearly all the most powerful nations of Europe were unable to shake.

But of all the countries of the world, Egypt, in the age of Ezekiel, was that, upon which it was peculiarly improbable, that the hard condition of unceasing servitude should be imposed. There the human mind had made some of its earliest and most auspicious efforts. It was long the general opinion, that there the laws of society had

had been discovered, and the fountains of science opened. Though the researches of the modern scholar into Indian antiquities may at length induce us to suppose, that the inhabitants of a more eastern country are justly entitled to the honour of many of those useful discoveries, which have hitherto been ascribed to the Egyptians; yet unquestionably that ingenious people were very early distinguished by an ardent spirit of enterprize, and a peculiar happiness of invention. The stupendous monuments of art, which still lie scattered over the banks of the Nile, attest the vastness of their designs, and the extent of their power. The earliest professors of literature, and the first founders of civil polity in Europe, and in the more western provinces of Asia, travelled into Egypt, and there acquired a knowledge of the fundamental principles of science and government, which, at their return to their respective countries, they advanced to a very high degree of perfection; and thus most essentially contributed to the ornament and dignity of human life.

But if we omit the consideration of these advantages, which must be acknowledged

prepared to yield herself, a weak and ignoble province, according to the decision of distant kingdoms, whose interests are involved in her fortunes.

To predict the discriminating characteristics of the inhabitants of a large territory, which would be unchangeable through all future time, must, if possible, lie still farther out of the reach of human ability, than to foretel their endless subjection. This strong proof of divine inspiration is strikingly exhibited in the Prophecy delivered respecting the descendants of Ishmael. Even when a people have arrived at maturity, and have displayed the distinguishing features of their national character, it is impossible to foresee, that those features will for ever remain unaltered. The great map of the world, even upon a superficial survey, will supply us with forcible evidence of the rashness of such an attempt. The countries, which it brings within our view, will recal to our immediate recollection the varieties of character, through which their inhabitants have severally passed. The vast continent of America is gradually undergoing an entire change,

change, in consequence of the discoveries of Columbus. The Europe of the ancient world differs as widely from the Europe of the present age, as the haughty and oppressive principle of republican Rome, from the meek and benevolent spirit of Christianity. The vales and mountains of Greece, once the seat of freedom, elegance, and the arts, are now ignobly tenanted by a race of slothful and willing slaves.

If then we are compelled, by the force of general experience, to allow, that the permanence of any peculiarities already existing among a people can not be foreseen even with the slightest degree of certainty, we shall be obliged to acquiesce in the divine origin of the Prophecy now under consideration, which was delivered under circumstances singularly unfavourable to such a foreknowledge. Before this peculiar cast of national character had begun to display itself, before the child was born, from whom the nation was to spring, it was clearly and strikingly delineated.

The very characteristics, it may further be urged, were singular in their kind; and have

have not since been paralleled in the annals of history. The Arabians were to be a wandering and ^k unsettled people ; they were never to be subject to a foreign yoke ; and they were to be at constant enmity with all mankind. If, therefore, we were disposed to allow, that, in the greater number of instances, the national character continues unvaried through the revolutions of ages, still it was in the highest degree improbable, that such distinctions as those, by which the Arabs are marked, would unceasingly remain ; and it is an absolute absurdity to suppose, that their continued duration could have been foreseen by the natural penetration of a theorist, before they had even begun to exist.

The region inhabited by the Arabs is not remote or insulated, separated from social life, and therefore exempt from the influence, which naturally results from intercourse with other countries. It is situated in that portion of the globe, in which society originated, and the first kingdoms were formed. The greatest em-

^k Genesis xvi. 12.

pires

pires of the world arose and fell around them. They have not been secluded from correspondence with foreign nations, and thus attached through ignorance and prejudice to simple and primitive manners. In the early periods of history they were united as allies to the most powerful monarchs of the East: under their victorious Prophet they once carried their arms over the most considerable kingdoms of the earth: through many succeeding ages, the caravans of the merchant, and the companies of Mahometan pilgrims, passed regularly over their deserts: even their religion has undergone a total change. Yet all these circumstances, which, it might be supposed, would have subdued the most stubborn prejudices, and altered the most inveterate habits, have produced no effect upon the Arabs, and they still preserve unimpaired a most exact resemblance to the first descendants of Ishmael.

Their habits of life, far from inducing the surrounding nations to leave them to a peaceable enjoyment of their native wilderness and independence, must have constantly awakened a general spirit of resentment,

ment, and given birth to combinations most dangerous to their security. Exclusive of the love of glory and empire, which would prompt the more ambitious sovereigns to annex Arâbia to their dominions, it must have been the common cause of kings and of people, to reduce to subjection, or utterly to extirpate, a race of lawless and daring wanderers, who considered themselves as released from the operation of the established laws of social life, and arrogated the right of violence and plunder, as an heritage bequeathed to them from heaven. They were not therefore neglected or despised. The most illustrious conquerors of the world marched their armies against them. But in vain was their subjection attempted by the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Persians, when in the meridian of their power. Alexander, after subduing the kingdoms of the East, was preparing an expedition against them, when his death intercepted the design. Five times did the Roman legions, conducted by their most renowned generals¹ and emperors, attempt to reduce Arabia to a tri-

¹ Lucullus, Pompey, Ælius Gallus, Trajan, Severus butary

butary province: and five times did they return unsuccessful from the deserts, and leave the Arabs free. This uniform failure must not be attributed to human causes alone. Large armies have frequently subsisted within their hot and sandy plains, which are interspersed with rich and most delightful spots, where the fountain and the grove of palm afford shade and refreshment to the exhausted soldier. But the expeditions were frustrated, sometimes by unexpected revolutions among their enemies, and sometimes by the most tremendous interposition of heaven^m. And to the divine Inspirer alone, the Lord of heaven and earth, can we attribute this anomaly in the state of society, the work of his power, as well as the subject of his Prophecy, which it is equally impossible that human ability should produce, or human wisdom foresee.

But the Oracles of God do not refer to individual kingdoms alone; they include

^m Particularly in the expeditions conducted by Trajan and Severus. See Dionys. Hist. lib. lxviii. p. 785. lib. lxxv. p. 855.

within

within their comprehensive scheme the fortunes of the greatest empires of the world. Those, which were given for this momentous end, are distinguished by a striking singularity in the mode of their delivery. The Prophet not only uttered the prediction, but subjoined the interpretation. This circumstance, added to the peculiar clearness of the expressions, has caused the writings of Daniel to bear a nearer resemblance to History than to Prophecy, and has induced some bold and superficial unbelievers unwarrantably to condemn them, as the forgeries of an age subsequent to the respective events.

The four great empires of the world, with the triumphant state of Christianity, were clearly and strongly pourtrayed. We shall be silent respecting the first and second empire. The Babylonian had reached the summit of prosperity in the age in which the Prophecy was delivered: and the Persian, by which it was overthrown, succeeded after so short an interval of time, that its rising fortune may be supposed to have been discernible by a sagacious political observer.

In

In the age of Daniel, which preceded the conquests of Alexander more than two hundred years, Macedon was a small and uncivilized kingdom, situated amidst wilds and mountains, undreaded and unknown. It was not distinguished among the nations of the world by military valour, superiority of internal policy, or a national spirit of enterprize. It had not even obtained a name among the Grecian states: nor had those states, upon whose ruins it afterwards arose, advanced far in the attainment of that greatness, which for a time shone forth with such uncommon brightness.

In the age of Daniel, Rome could scarcely be ranked among cities. It was a mean and unimportant town, placed in a remote and uncivilized quarter of the globe, the name of which had not reached the imperial court of Babylon. She was exposed to constant wars with the petty states around her, in each of which her very existence was endangered. Long did she continue to struggle humbly in Italy, and even centuries elapsed before she took her flight above the nations, and soared to fame and empire.

Five hundred years after the age of Daniel, a personage, who, uniting in a miraculous manner the divine and human nature, has been regarded through all succeeding times as the everlasting Son of the high God, born in an obscure village of an obscure territory, possessed of no human means of attraction, and supported by no earthly authority, promulgated a new Religion, and displayed signs and mighty wonders. Though he was despised and rejected by his countrymen, and, after a short ministry, was cut off by an ignominious death; yet his Religion, triumphing at length over all opposition, overthrew the altars of polytheism; while the temples of the God, whose will he revealed, were erected throughout all the fairest provinces of the globe.

Now it cannot be conceived possible, that any causes favourable to the propagation of Christianity could have been subject to the observation of the Prophet. Though human affairs were undoubtedly so disposed by divine Wisdom, as peculiarly to favour its successful progress; yet they could not, it is presumed, have been rendered

dered effective, except in conjunction with those miraculous powers, which were actually displayed. And it may with truth be asserted, that in the age immediately preceding its rise, and even at the time when its divine Founder first appeared among mankind, no appearances could be discerned, which to an uninspired mind would afford the slightest presage of the extraordinary event about to be accomplished. No intimation of it could be discovered, except in the writings of the inspired Prophets, and in general rumour vague and fallacious, the consequence of erroneous explications of their meaning.

Yet in the age of Daniel were clearly predicted these three changes in the affairs of mankind, the most momentous which history records. The characteristics, by which they were respectively distinguished, were accurately delineated ; and the order, in which they successively arose, was faithfully described. The figures, under which the achievements of Alexander were represented, point out the rapidity of his conquests, the universality of his dominion, and the quadruple division of his

empire among his favourite chiefs. Rome was depicted by the difference of its government from that of the preceding empires, by its greatness, and by its terrible and irresistible power in war, by the subjugation of the nations under its iron yoke, and by its proud rule over the whole globe. Christianity was described as silently emerging without the aid of human policy, holy and spiritual in its nature, extending over all nations, and enduring through all time.

Weak, indeed, must be the Sceptic, who, after a candid investigation of the subject, shall ascribe to the natural penetration of the human mind such a fore-knowledge of the greatest kingdoms and of their characteristic differences. Let the boldest and most subtle speculator stand forth, and take the next thousand years for the wide field of his Prophecies. Let him foretel the grandest and most surprising revolutions, which will occur during that period, in the importance of which all other events are swallowed up and lost: let the principles, and the agents, by which they shall be effected, be supposed to be at

at this moment entirely concealed from his knowledge: let the order in which they shall arise, and the distinguishing features by which they shall be characterized, be accurately pourtrayed: let the first empire, to be founded upon the ruins of the most flourishing monarchies of the earth, be predicted as about to come forth, not from the bosom of civilized society, from a populous territory, or a powerful kingdom, but from some rude and mountainous country, remote from the residence of the speculator, and now obscurely known: let the second empire, the future mistress of the world, be destined to arise, when the first shall have passed away, from some distant and unimportant town, the name of which has not yet reached our shores: let the third revolution, far the most remarkable both in its nature and its duration, and unparalleled in the annals of all past ages, be silently effected by a poor and humble individual, wandering among unsocial and bigotted tribes, the members of which are regarded with contempt by the inhabitants of civilized regions: let the Sceptic, I say, submit to our observation such a map of future history, in which the events recorded

are few, simple, and in the highest degree important; and let but one observer, possessed of cool and dispassionate judgment, maintain, either that future occurrences so singular and momentous, the causes of which have yet scarcely begun to operate, with all their most distinguishing peculiarities, can be brought to our knowledge by the happiest effort of human wisdom, or that, when boldly conjectured, it lies within the compass of our ideas respecting the nature of human contingencies, that they shall all really take place in the precise order, with the several peculiarities, and to the full extent predicted: let but one dispassionate observer be found, who shall maintain either of these positions, and we may almost venture to declare, that we will forego our belief in sacred Prophecy, and no longer exalt the predictions of Sion above the frantic effusions of Heathen Oracles, or the wild conjectures of Heathen Augury.

But the spirit of Prophecy was once manifested on an occasion even more singular perhaps than any, which has already been considered. It foreshewed the future existence

existence of a spiritual tyranny the most extraordinary, to which the ambition and ingenuity of man have ever given birth. I shall be pardoned, I trust, for repeating the description of this strange and most formidable power. In the sixth century before Christ, and again in more express terms during the age immediately subsequent to his appearance, it was predicted, that, at a distant period ⁿ, when the Roman empire, then triumphant over the world, should fall into decay, a power ^o, the name of which was hieroglyphically specified, should arise from its ruins, and fix ^p its seat of dominion in the ancient capital of the world; that this power should be founded in the mystery of iniquity, and exhibit that prodigy in the moral and political world, which the Prophet emphatically denominated the Man of Sin; that it should impose upon the credulity of its followers, by flagrant falsehoods, and an abandoned profligacy of deceit; that it should alter the course of society, and even abrogate the laws of nature, by forbidding both-

ⁿ Daniel vii. 7, 8, 24. ^o Thessalonians ii. 6, 7.

^p Revelations xiii. 18. ^p Revelations xvii. 9.

^q marriage and the use of meats; that it should support its usurped authority by the most relentless cruelty, by deluging ^r its extensive territories with the blood of its enemies, or by driving ^s them forth, helpless and hopeless, from all the comforts and charities of social life; that it should ^t impiously lay claim to a supernatural influence, and subdue the untutored mind by pretended acts of Omnipotence; that, deviating from the pure and simple worship of the first Christians, it should introduce ^u idolatry and the doctrine of demons; and, neglecting the mediation of the ever blessed Jesus, should supplicate the divine Power through the intervention of departed mortals; that it should carry up its blasphemous pretensions ^v to an height, which it is scarcely possible to contemplate without feelings of awful apprehension, should arrogate the incommunicable attributes and omnipotent authority of the supreme

^q 1 Timothy iv. 2.

^r Daniel vii. 21, 25. Revelations xvii. 6. xviii. 24.

^s Revelations xiii. 16, 17.

^t 2 Thessalonians ii. 9, 10. Revelations xiii. 13, 14.

^u 1 Timothy iv. 1. Daniel xi. 38.

^v Daniel vii. 25. xi. 36. 2 Thessalonians ii. 4.

Being,

Being, and, seated in his hallowed temple, shew itself to an idolizing world, as the eternal and incomprehensible God, the Lord of heaven and earth^y: and lastly, that, having tyrannized more than twelve hundred years over the minds as well as persons of the greatest portion of the Christian world, it should fall at length into decay, and be^z delivered over to condemnation and endless perdition.

Such are the features of the Papacy, than which no system could have been devised, more unlikely to arise from a perversion of the doctrines and spirit of the Gospel. Though, in the Apostolic age, to a prophetic eye the fatal power was then shewn to be working; yet by unassisted human reason the dawn of such a tyranny could not surely be discerned. The imagination could scarcely have conceived one more inconsistent with the spot-

^y Compare 2 Theffalonians ii. 4. with Bishop Newton's account of the adoration paid to the new-elected Pope. "Quem creant, adorant," was the inscription used on the medals of Martin V. See Newton's *Dissertations on the Prophecies*. Diff. xxv.

^z Daniel vii. 25. *Revelations* xix. 19, 20.

less and unassuming character of primitive Christianity. Had the ingenuity of man, speculating upon the corruptions by which even the purest gifts of divine benevolence are liable to be deformed, been employed during those early times in divining the probable perversions, to which Christianity would be subject in its progress through a vicious world, he would not surely have been induced to predict the proud pomp of superstition, nor the arrogance and tyranny of predominating power, nor the impious pretensions of an assumed divinity. With much greater probability might he have apprehended the temporary prevalence of that lawless spirit, of that equal distribution of property, and of those visionary plans of society, which gave disturbance to some parts of Germany at the period of the Reformation, and were the subjects of dangerous speculation in our own country during the civil dissensions of the last century. Let me not be supposed to insinuate, that our pure and holy Religion affords the slightest sanction or countenance to such destructive principles. No. It marks them with decisive and unqualified disapprobation. I wish merely to observe,

serve, that, from the peculiar nature of some of the original doctrines of Christianity, and from the probable effect of their operation upon corrupt or fanatical minds, such a species of abuse was more likely than any other to arise. Hence it is reasonable to suppose, that an impostor would naturally have selected this particular kind of perversion, as the most proper subject of conjecture. But the real Prophets were silent upon this part of the subject; and displayed their eloquence in describing events, the possibility of which could scarcely have been admitted, till it was sensibly demonstrated by their occurrence.

From the whole tenor of the preceding Discourse, it appears, that, in many of the most momentous instances, the events foreshewn were not only all in the highest degree **IMPROBABLE**, but some the very **REVERSE** of those, which might naturally have been expected from the general course of human affairs, or the peculiar character of circumstances, as they existed in the age of the Prophet. To ascribe therefore such a prescience of the Prophets to a mere spirit of conjecture, or to consider the comple-
tion

tion of their predictions as the fortunate coincidence of circumstances, appears to be an act of gross ignorance, of obstinate blindness, or of wilful perversion of the truth.

Let it not be imagined that instances illustrative of the argument are rare, and that those, which I have now adduced, can alone be discovered among the numerous predictions of the Old and New Testament. I have expatiated more fully upon those few, for the sake of exciting the curiosity of the inquisitive, and of inducing them to contemplate Prophecy at large, with a reference to the particular proposition, which I have now endeavoured to confirm. When attention has once been awakened, numerous predictions will present themselves, by which the truth of the position will be amply illustrated.

What but divine inspiration could have instructed Noah in that intimate knowledge of futurity, by which he foresaw ^a the unceasing servitude of the descendants of his three sons ?

^a Genesis ix. 25, 26, 27.

What

What but divine inspiration could have enabled the favoured Patriarch to mark, with such precision, those discriminating and seemingly inconsistent circumstances in the future fortunes of his two sons, Jacob^b and Esau; that the elder should delight in war and violence, and yet be subject to the younger?

What but the foresight of God could have conceived the possibility, and what but the illuminating spirit of God could have excited in Balaam the opinion, that the Israelites, a people entirely unknown to the Prophet, should, in opposition to every principle of national policy, and to some of the strongest inclinations of the human heart, always dwell^c alone; in a separate and peculiar state of society?

What but the over-ruling influence of divine Wisdom could have impressed upon his mind the final extinction^d of the Amalekites, and especially at that particular season, in which they were considered even

^b Genesis xxvii. 40.

^c Numbers xxiii. 9.

^d Numbers xxiv. 22.

by

by himself as the first, the most ancient, and the most powerful among the nations, which inhabited that part of the globe ?

Who on principles of mere human speculation could have dared to predict the overthrow of Tyre by the power of the Chaldeans ^c, in an age when Chaldea was yet in the form of a tributary province ; and when the Assyrian empire, advanced, to its highest state of power and prosperity, was most likely, if its overthrow was at all probable, to effect the utter destruction of that haughty city ?

Was it probable in the age of Isaiah, that the glory of the God of the Hebrews would be peculiarly advanced by the future successes of a Persian conqueror ? Is there not a coincidence in the highest degree extraordinary, and inexplicable upon mere human principles, between the predictions of that Prophet, and the actual proclamations of Cyrus ? In the former it is asserted, that the founder of the Persian empire would be elevated by the Almighty

^c Isaiah xxiii. 13.

^f Isaiah xliv. xlv.

to

to an uncommon height of power, fame, and riches, for the express purpose of making known his name and glory to all the inhabitants of the earth. In the latter the ^g royal conqueror, contrary to the general practice, publickly ascribes the merit of his victories, not to the Eastern deities, whom he and his fathers had worshipped, but to the one only God, the Lord God of heaven, the Lord God of Israel.

Was it probable that the ^h Egyptians should be converted to the knowledge of the true God, and that the descendants of Abraham should worship Jehovah in that very land, in which their ancestors had been treated with unparalleled severity, and the inhabitants of which had since been uniformly held forth as objects of their just abhorrence and continued enmity?

Was it not contrary to all probability in the days of the ancient Prophets, in the peculiar state of separation in which the

^g Ezra i. 1, 2, 3. ^h 2 Chronicles xxxvi. 23.

^h Isaiah xix. 18, 25.

Jewish

Jewish people had been placed by the Almighty, that an universal Religion would, at a future period, be promulgated by an inhabitant of Judea, or that it would be generally received at the preaching of a Jew by the Gentiles ?

Was it not contrary to all probability in the days immediately preceding the crucifixion, when the followers of our Lord, terrified, dispirited, and despairing, were about to forsake him, and to flee, that nevertheless, before the passing away even of that generation, his ¹ Gospel should be published in all the world ; and that at length it should obtain a complete and lasting triumph over the superstitions of the earth, though inevitably exposed to a general and most inveterate opposition, from the mercenary views of the artificer and the priest, from the pride of the philosopher, from the power and policy of the magistrate, and from the religious prejudices and corrupt passions of the people ?

Was it not contrary to all probability in

¹ Matthew xxiv. 14. Mark xiii. 10.

the

the days of our Saviour, that the inhabitants of Judea would be led away captive into all nations by the Romans? They had before yielded to the arms of Rome, and no such calamitous consequence ensued. Nay, it was the generous policy of that victorious people, almost uniformly observed in the later ages of the state, to leave to the vanquished kingdoms the secure possession of the greatest part of their territories, and, in general, their national polity and the exercise of all their religious rites. In the instance of the Jews alone, this custom was flagrantly violated: and it is not perhaps unworthy of remark, that it was violated, not by a stern, capricious, and sanguinary tyrant, a Tiberius, a Caligula, or a Nero; but by a prince, who was the brightest ornament of imperial Rome, whose character was marked by an unbounded spirit of philanthropy, and who was distinguished by the godlike appellation of the love and delight of mankind ^k.

The time would fail me, were I to pro-

^k *Amor et deliciae humani generis.*

K

ceed

ceed through all the numerous instances recorded in the sacred Writings corroborative of the principle, which has been advanced. By those already given, curiosity may perhaps be excited, and the source of enquiry opened. The more closely this part of the subject is pursued, the stronger conviction will be produced of the inspiration of Jewish and Christian Prophecy. Let the unprejudiced enquirer, instead of seeking, like the Sceptic, for doubts, or magnifying real difficulties and plausible objections, investigate the precise nature of the Prophecies, and reflect upon the peculiar circumstances, under which they were respectively uttered. By such a mode of examination he will be enabled rationally to convince himself, that, at the time of delivery, their completion must frequently have seemed directly opposite to present appearances, to reasonable expectations, and to the regular order of human occurrences. And let it be remembered, that he, who has once been firmly fixed in this persuasion, will scarcely be induced, even by the most specious arguments, to renounce his faith in their divine origin, or

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or to unite with the Infidel in representing them either as the effusions of wild visionaries, or the frauds of artful impostors.

S E R M O N IV.

DEUTERONOMY iv. 32.

ASK NOW OF THE DAYS THAT ARE PAST,
WHICH WERE BEFORE THEE, SINCE THE
DAY THAT GOD CREATED MAN UPON
THE EARTH; AND ASK FROM THE ONE
SIDE OF HEAVEN UNTO THE OTHER,
WHETHER THERE HATH BEEN ANY SUCH
THING, AS THIS GREAT THING IS, OR
HATH BEEN HEARD LIKE IT.

IN exhibiting the proofs of a divine interposition in the instance of Prophecy, it appears to be in the highest degree useful, if not absolutely necessary, to establish and enforce the positions advanced by multiplied examples. From the operation of physical causes, or from peculiar habits of reflection, or from favourite modes of re-

search, different minds are attracted and influenced by different illustrations. Besides, the very circumstance of numbers and variety in the instances adduced is productive of a powerful effect, and essentially contributes to the firm establishment of our faith. And let it be remembered, that the defender of Christianity is not occupied, on these occasions, upon cold and abstract reasonings, nor does he labour merely to arrive at a knowledge of truth : he strenuously endeavours, upon the most momentous subject, which can engage the attention or interest the feelings of a reasonable and immortal being, to overpower with conviction the mind, which may anxiously desire to be satisfied ; but, from the extraordinary nature of the case, may be justly fearful of affording a precipitate assent.

Though the predictions considered in a former Lecture are eminently striking, and ought to satisfy the most scrupulous enquirer ; yet they are unquestionably exceeded, in many important characteristics, by a Prophecy perhaps the most wonderful, which was delivered in the long course of

of divine Revelation. As, in the material world, different degrees of splendour and magnificence are imparted to different productions of the almighty Creator: so, in the course of the awful manifestation of his Omniscience, he has afforded a stronger appearance of divinity to particular parts of his Revelation, though all are undoubtedly raised above human ability, and are equally worthy of God.

The circumstance to which I allude is the present astonishing condition of the Jewish people. As it is submitted to our daily observation, and is singularly calculated both to excite curiosity and to produce conviction, I have reserved it for the subject of a separate Discourse, and shall now consider it at large as forcibly illustrative of the principle, which I have advanced, respecting the frequent **IMPROBABILITY** of the events foretold by the ancient Prophets.

In representing with fidelity the present condition of the Jews, for the purpose of strongly illustrating and confirming the truth of Prophecy, it is impossible not to

admit such sentiments and descriptions, as must give pain to that unfortunate nation. Let it not, however, be supposed, that this duty is performed by the advocate of Christianity, without a considerable degree of reluctance. No sincere Christian can wantonly wound the feelings or aggravate the miseries of an afflicted people^a. Persecution, what-

* The sincere Christian cannot without reluctance describe this humiliating condition of the Jews. The argument however required a true and most forcible statement: and I am justified in making it, not by general opinion alone, which may be erroneous from prejudice; not by the sentiments of Voltaire, which scepticism may have warped; but by the confession of some of the politest and most liberal writers, who have ever appeared among that unfortunate people. I allude to the Letters of certain Jews to M. de Voltaire. Though coming forward in defence of their nation in general against the virulent attack and exaggerated representations of the French Infidel, they seem to defend only one particular sect of it. They make a wide distinction between the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, and all other Jews, mentioned under the general title of Polish and Germans. These latter, according to a statement of the Monthly Review, which was thought worthy of being admitted by them in a subsequent edition into the body of their work, "scattered over the whole Eastern and Western empires, have always lived, since the time of Constantine the Great, in Greece and Asia, and since that of Charlemagne in the west, in oppression and misery, looked upon as slaves, and inhumanly treated as such. And they are treated much

" in

whatever form it may assume, is utterly irreconcileable with the pure and gentle spirit of our Religion. Though we know, that the lengthened sufferings of the Jews were decreed in the councils of divine Wisdom; yet we also know, that the nations, whose evil passions have at different times been rendered instrumental in their punishment, were frequently in their turn rejected, when the dreadful office had been fulfilled. We acknowledge, with sensations of grateful respect, that from the Jews we have derived the sacred Oracles of God;

" in the same manner now, even in Europe, almost in every part of Germany, at Venice, and in all the ecclesiastical states." From this passage, it is evident, that the Jews called German and Polish must constitute far the most considerable portion of the whole people. In these letters the Portuguese and Spanish Jews are represented as not distinguished, like the other descendants of Abraham, from the rest of mankind by deficiency in elegance, refinement, and literature, but as elevated in mind above their * brethren of other nations, insomuch that, even by the confession of those very brethren, it has been sometimes scarcely credited, that they were both of one common stock. All other Jews, it is allowed by these writers, " are despised and reviled on all sides, are often persecuted, and always insulted: even human nature among them, it has been confessed, is debased and degraded †."

* Letters of certain Jews, &c. vol. i. p. 66.

† Ib. p. 40.

that

that among them arose the holy Prophets, and the glorious company of the Apostles ; and that from among their brethren, in the fulness of time, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, was born ^b. We are induced, moreover, to expect, from the strong assurance of Prophecy, that their dispersion and calamities will be but for an appointed time ; and that they will finally be restored to the favour of God. And with sincerity and earnestness we join in the pious and charitable petition of our Liturgy, that they may soon be brought home to the flock of our blessed Lord, and become with us one fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ, our common Saviour and Redeemer.

On the present occasion, the argument requires me to state in forcible terms the severe calamities, to which they have long been subject, and which they still continue in some degree to suffer.

In an early age of the world, more than three thousand years ago, a few poor and

^b See Newton on the Prophecies. Diff. viii.

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unimportant tribes, delivered from a state of bondage and oppression, were wandering over a barren and dreary wilderness. Their leader, the acknowledged minister of Heaven, at the conclusion of long and successful labours, and the close of a holy life, presented to their view an affecting picture of their future condition, when they should have incurred the just displeasure of their God. With a vigour of expression, which has never been exceeded, and with a minuteness of detail, which has seldom been equalled, even by the most accurate historian, he represented to them, that they should be ^c scattered among all people from the one end of the earth even unto the other ; that ^d among these nations they should find no ease, neither should the sole of their feet have rest ; that they should be smitten ^e by the Lord with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart ; that they should have a ^f trembling of heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind ; that they ^g should

^c Deuteronomy xxviii. 64.

^d Id. xxviii. 28.

^e Id. xxviii. 37.

^f Id. xxviii. 65.

^g Id. xxviii. 65.

become

become an astonishment, a proverb, and a bye-word ; that they ^h should be oppressed evermore, and that no man should save them. It is added, that their ⁱ life should hang in doubt, and that they should fear night and day, and should have none assurance of their life ; that, in the bitterness of anguish, in the morning they should say, ^k Would God it were even ! and at even they should say, Would God it were morning ! Furthermore, it is declared, that though they should be dispersed and afflicted in this severe and awful manner, yet that God ^l would not cast them away, nor abhor them to destroy them utterly ; but that, as their ^m plagues were great and wonderful, so should they be of long continuance ; and that ⁿ they should be upon them for a sign, and for a wonder, and upon their seed for ever.

From the description of the Prophet let us turn to the annals of the Historian. When the holy city of David had yielded to the vic-

^h Deut. xxviii. 29, 31.

^k Id. xxviii. 67.

^m Deut. xxviii. 59.

ⁱ Id. xxviii. 68.

^l Levit. xxvi. 44.

ⁿ Deut. xxviii. 46.

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torious arms of Rome, the inhabitants were expelled from their native territory, and scattered through all the kingdoms of the world. Since the time of that calamitous event, they have wandered over every portion of the globe, without national possessions, an acknowledged constitution, or independent laws. They were represented by the Roman historian, as actuated, previously to their dispersion, by a spirit of hatred towards the whole human race. Since that dreadful calamity, they have lived almost constantly in a state of reciprocal hatred with mankind. Though generally submissive to the laws, and strangers to political intrigue, they have frequently been exposed to persecution and plunder, even with the connivance of governments, which, in all other instances, have guarded as sacred the property of individuals. Though abundantly possessed of riches, which usually command the respect of mankind, and enoble even ignorance and folly, they have been generally treated with contempt by the powerful, and sometimes even followed with insult by the populace. They have been driven from city to city, from country

try to country: even their children [°] have sometimes been forcibly taken from their parental protection, and educated in a religion, which is the object of their hereditary aversion. Their lives have not unfrequently been estimated without any regard to the high importance usually annexed to the existence of human beings. In Christian countries, and under regular governments, they have in some instances been sacrificed to a wanton and unrelenting spirit of cruelty, in violation of all laws human and divine, and in opposition to the feelings of our nature. They seem, as it were, to have lost their rank in the creation, and to have sunk nearly below humanity. Their fellow-creatures appear in many countries to have refused to them alone the justice due to all, and the compassion inherent in man.

Such is the faithful though melancholy picture of a people, once distinguished by

[°] In Roman Catholic countries, particularly in Spain and Portugal. See Newton on the Prophecies, and Patrick's Commentary on Deuteronomy xxviii. 32.

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the peculiar favour of the Almighty ; for whom the sea was divided in Egypt, and the sun stood still upon Gibeon ; whose laws were brought down from heaven, and whose ancestors walked with God.

Yet amidst multiplied instances of oppression, misery, and contempt, they have resolutely continued through seventeen hundred years a separate and distinct people. Their God hath ^p not cast them away, nor abhorred them, to destroy them utterly ; their great ^q and wonderful plagues, which were to be of long continuance, still remain : the curses are yet upon them, which, in the strong language of Scripture^r, were to be for a sign and for a wonder upon them and their seed for ever. Not mingled and lost among the kingdoms, over which they have been scattered, they retain the means, upon their returning obedience, of beholding their ^s captivity turned ; and of being gathered from the nations, and restored to the land of their fathers ^t.

This

^p Levit. xxvi. 44.

^q Deut. xxviii. 59.

^r Deut. xxviii. 46, 59.

^s Id. xxx. 1, 2, 3, 4.

^t The passages in the Pentateuch, which we have quoted, appear,

This is the part of the Prophecy, which incontestably places it far above the reach of human wisdom, or the suspicion of imposture. If the claim to divine Revelation be rejected, it will not be in the power of the historian or the philosopher to assign any cause, which will satisfactorily explain this extraordinary condition of an whole people. Their continuance in such a situation is unexampled, and we may even venture to pronounce it miraculous. It cannot therefore be supposed, that it could have been anticipated, by the most sag-

appear, and are generally allowed, decisively to prove, that Moses foresaw this extraordinary circumstance in the present fortunes of his countrymen. Our blessed Lord, (Luke xxi. 22.) when he predicted the approaching calamities of the Jews, expressly asserted, that those were the days of vengeance, that *all* things, which were written, might be fulfilled. Jeremiah (xlvi. 28. xxx. 11. xxiii. 3.) and many other Prophets, (Isaiah x. 21, 22. Ezekiel vi. 8, 9. Amos ix. 9.) predicted it in the most express language, which cannot be interpreted in any other sense, nor referred to any other times. The argument is here stated as referring to the Prophecy of Moses; though, if the application of the passages from the Pentateuch should not be admitted, with some slight alteration of the manner, and with no diminution of its force, it may be rendered equally applicable to the words of the later Prophets, of the precise sense of which no doubt can be entertained.

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cious penetration, or the most fortunate conjecture.

If we represent to ourselves an impostor, in the age of Moses, desirous of acquiring reputation by a pretended knowledge of futurity, every argument, which could have suggested itself to his understanding, must have discovered the absurdity of the prediction, which he ventured to deliver; and he may justly be charged with either madness, or unpardonable credulity, if he supposed, that its possibility would either be admitted by his hearers at the moment, or confirmed by the event in future. If he had turned his eyes around upon the nations, which were then presented to his view, the general appearance must have forcibly dissuaded him from hazarding so unreasonable a conjecture. The predicted condition of his countrymen was contrary to the state of all the nations, which had previously existed in the world, or were at that period in being. In the more refined ages of mankind, when the intercourse between countries is frequent and extensive, when commerce has united by a common band the most re-

mote regions, and liberality of sentiment has kindled a spirit of toleration and universal benevolence, the habits and customs of a foreign and distant race of men are not only endured, but are, in many instances, even courteously received by the natives. It is not so among the rude hordes of primitive society. The savage looks down with disdain, or rises with indignation, upon all who are not of his tribe. He hates the customs which differ from his own. The unknown intruders are either exterminated at a blow, or gradually exhausted by unceasing oppression. When barbarians leave their native land, they are either borne away by conquerors, or are animated to relinquish it by a spirit of enterprize. In the former case, they are soon restored by the fortune of war to the country of their ancestors, or they imperceptibly melt into one common people with their conquerors. In the latter, under the conduct of a daring and successful chief, they expel the natives from a favourite territory, or they found an infant state amidst the wastes and solitude of nature. Such was the conduct of mankind from the earliest æras of the world, to a period subsequent

quent to the times of Moses. It was not, therefore, from a similar situation among other people, into which, according to the course of society, it was natural to imagine, the descendants of Israel might fall, that the Prophet was induced to utter this prediction. The condition, as I have before asserted, was contrary to every example then presented to his view, and unparalleled in the annals of all preceding ages.

Had the history of the whole future world been brought by anticipation within the knowledge of Moses, the uniform course of social life must have convinced him, that even the existence of such a state of society as he described, except under an extraordinary and immediate interposition of God, was in the highest degree improbable. Foreign tribes, when admitted into a country, gradually intermingle with the natives, and, after the lapse of a few generations, are blended and lost among the original inhabitants. Excited at once by principles of interest, and by a natural spirit of imitation, they soon possess in common the same government, the same laws,

laws, the same religion, and, after a longer course of years, even the same national character, and the same internal disposition of mind. The modern kingdoms of Europe were composed, at their first constitution, of very different races of men. The ferocious hordes of the north, descending into the fertile and delightful provinces of the Roman empire, united themselves with the natives of the districts in which they respectively settled, and soon formed with them common and independent states. In what kingdom at this day can we distinguish between the descendants of the primitive inhabitants, and those of their barbarous invaders? Who can separate in France the race of the indigenous Gauls, from the successors of the Franks and Burgundians? Where are the distinct traces in Spain between the ancient Iberi, and the descendants of their Gothic conquerors? If we look round among our own countrymen, in vain shall we endeavour to discover the distinguishing characteristics of the respective families, which are derived from the Romans or the Saxons, from the Danes or the Normans, or from the original inhabitants of Britain.

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If, withdrawing our attention from the general custom of mankind, we confine it to the particular character of the Jewish people, we shall discover that there was no peculiarity in their disposition, which could authorize their leader to predict so wonderful a deviation from the regular course of human nature. When we examine the most remarkable features of their national character, as displayed under the divine government, we shall find them to be of all men the least likely to have experienced, in these later times, such a striking singularity of fortune. In the early ages of their history, they were distinguished by a culpable, nay almost an unnatural eagerness to forsake the worship of their God, and to adopt the superstitions of the surrounding nations. While they were supported by the manifest interposition of the Deity; while his manna was falling from heaven, and the pillar of fire was yet burning before their armies, they bowed down to other gods, and imitated the forbidden rites of idolaters. Even at the solemn foundation of their polity, amidst the most awful manifestations of the divine presence upon the mountain, they erected the mol-

ten image in the adjacent valley. In the subsequent periods of their history, while still blessed with the peculiar favour of the Almighty, they were frequently seduced to desert his worship, even while they beheld his repeated miracles, and were daily supported by his power. Though they were invited, on the one hand, to a dutiful submission, by the most alluring prospect of temporal rewards; and were exposed, on the other, to an immediate infliction of the tremendous punishments, with which their rebellion was threatened: and though, in most instances, these rewards and punishments were the certain consequences of their piety, or of their disobedience; yet they constantly relapsed into idolatry, and polluted themselves with the forbidden rites of the Heathens. While the tops of the hills were every where illuminated with the fires kindled to the base and imaginary deities of the nations, seven thousand only in Israel remained faithful to the God who had conducted their fathers from the land of bondage. Yet this very people, when not only rejected by the Almighty, but suffering under his severe and visible displeasure, when scattered over all the habitable

bitable globe, and exposed through their whole existence to oppression, to sorrow, and to shame, notwithstanding all these strong and multiplied causes for an union with the different nations of the world, were inflexibly to continue in a distinct state, in manifest contradiction to the uniform spirit of their ancestors, and to the common propensities of nature.

The historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire^u, who has in many instances borne strong though perhaps unwilling testimony to the truth of Prophecy^x, has noticed in a manner peculiarly striking the strange inconsistency in the character of the Jews under the first and under the second Temple, and has thus unintentionally given additional force to the miraculous nature of this extraordinary prediction. For the inconsistency of the modern Jews, in their inflexible attachment to the Law of Moses, is incompara-

^u See Gibbon's Roman History, v. i. c. xv. p. 539. 4^{to}.

^x See Whitaker's Pamphlet expressly written for the purpose of shewing the numerous instances, in which the truth of sacred Prophecy may be confirmed upon the authority of the Infidel historian.

bly more extraordinary than that of the inhabitants of Judea after the captivity, at which the writer sarcastically expresses amazement. The inference, however, which he insidiously endeavours to draw from the circumstance, is very different from that, which the Christian may justly derive from it.

There could be no peculiarities in the character of the Jews, or in the nature of their various establishments, subject to observation in the age of Moses, which might embolden an artful speculator to indulge so extraordinary and improbable a conjecture respecting their future condition. If we examine their national character, with a reference to this particular subject, as circumstances unfolded it in succeeding times, we shall discover the most decisive proofs in support of this assertion. When settled upon the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean, they consisted of twelve tribes. Of these, ten were dispersed in captivity over the East. And though individuals may have returned in the reign of Cyrus with the inhabitants of Judah to Jerusalem; yet the people at large, falling away by insen-
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sible intermixture, at length totally disappeared among the natives of the countries, into which they had been conveyed ; while two alone have survived a similar dispersion, persevering in the religion and customs of their ancestors, and exhibiting a wonderful phænomenon in the moral world. The government, the sacred rites, the manners, the disposition of the twelve tribes, were uniform in the age of Moses. And no possible reason can be assigned why, while the greater number of them have apparently melted away into the stream of social life, the remnant have clearly, and in the fullest manner, verified the prediction, by resolutely refusing to coalesce, and by viewing with a full and apathetic interest the alluring and splendid examples by which they are constantly surrounded. Yet the Prophet expressly predicted the peculiar preservation, which awaited the remnant of a people, in contradiction not only to general custom, but to the experience of a great majority of their own nation.

One of the fundamental principles of the Mosaic dispensation, it might reasonably have been supposed, would powerfully

fully incite the people, when placed in the peculiar circumstances, which were predicted, and which have actually attended their dispersion, to renounce the law of their Prophet, and depart altogether from their faith in the God of their fathers. The blessings which he had promised were temporal. Immediate rewards were to follow their obedience. The Christian under the pressure of severe and hopeless afflictions looks forward to a final recompence in another world, and receives support and comfort from the firm expectation of a future state of happiness. But the hopes of the Jew were in a great degree confined to his present existence. When worldly prosperity and comfort became apparently unattainable, the strong tie, which bound him to the observance of his law, it should seem, would be dissolved. To a rational speculator it could scarcely have appeared possible, that a people, placed under an economy, in which temporal welfare was the promised reward of obedience, would steadfastly persevere in their fidelity, when all temporal welfare was withdrawn, and they were exposed to the longest and most heavy calamities, which, in the administration

tion of the moral government of the world, the great Disposer of all events has ever inflicted upon any nation.

From the preceding remarks, the prediction of Mofes appears to be contrary to the regular course of society, to the particular disposition of the Jewish people, and to the particular spirit of the Jewish law. But in addition to the arguments already adduced, there were to be peculiar circumstances in their condition, by which an impostor must have been convinced, that they would be more especially tempted to coalesce with the inhabitants of the countries, over which they would be dispersed. They were to be a scattered people. They were not to be united and fixed in one place, as were their ancestors in Egypt. In such a state, it would have seemed not altogether improbable, that they might preserve their national union, from the influence of numbers, of continual intercourse with each other, and of hereditary customs and manners perpetually present to their senses. But when divided and scattered, when possessed of no national establishment, when daily *versant*,

versant, in all the affairs of life, with the principles and practices of other nations, it might naturally be expected, that they would gradually depart from the usages of their ancestors, and insensibly intermingle with the people, by whom they should be surrounded. Again, it was natural to imagine, that the miseries, to which this unhappy people were devoted, would force them to surrender through fear, or to renounce with indignation, the distinctions and even the name of their tribes ; that when sinking under the pressure of their own calamities, and surveying the sufferings of their relatives and countrymen ; when looking back upon the wretched condition of those, who had gone before them, and anticipating with paternal apprehension the wrongs and woes, to which their children must be born ; they would fly for shelter to an union with the native inhabitants, and seek an equal participation of their laws, and an equal protection from their government :—and, lastly, that when reflecting, in addition to their sufferings, upon the obloquy universally annexed to their name, they would throw it off in a spirit of manly resentment, and bury in oblivion

livion the records and the memory of their nation. Marked out, on many occasions, for mockery and insult, listening, not unfrequently, to the taunts of their passing fellow creatures; in some instances, the theme of national tales, and the subject of national merriment; surely, according to the common feelings of nature, they would hasten with eagerness to adopt the means, which might restore them to the respect of mankind, to burst asunder all the bonds of a separate society, and to regain, by a mixture with other nations, the rank which they could not enjoy during the continuance of their own.

In addition to these predicted peculiarities of fortune, there are others not particularly foretold, to which they might be subject, and which they have in reality experienced; which, according to the usual operation of human causes, might reasonably be expected to frustrate so extraordinary a Prophecy, and occasion the intermixture and final extinction of the Jews among the nations, over which they have been dispersed. They have lived in ages, in which science and refinement have been advanced

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to an unprecedented degree of excellence. Yet they have remained almost entire strangers to their influence. Surrounded by splendour, and overflowing with opulence, they are, for the most part, insensible to the elegant pleasures of cultivated society: educated in philosophic countries, they are in general, notwithstanding some illustrious exceptions, little captivated by the charms of literature, or animated by the effusions of genius. All that is splendid, all that is amiable in life, appears, in most instances, to rise and fall before them unnoticed and unfelt. Even imitation, which is natural to man, seems almost to have lost its power; and the progress of society, which ever keeps pace with opportunity, among them alone has been strangely checked and prevented. Again, they have been devoted to their secular interests, and have been engaged, even with the basest and most servile spirit, in the accumulation of wealth. Now it was extremely natural, that, under such circumstances, they should adopt, from motives of policy, the manners, the government, and the religion of the people, among whom they hoped to prosper. By these means they would conciliate general

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confidence ; they would secure their possessions from violence ; and they would enlarge the sphere of their commerce under the auspices of the government, to whose privileges and liberties they should be admitted.

Such a situation indeed of an whole people appears to be opposite to the very nature of civil society. No similar instance can be found in all the pages of history, amidst all the diversities of climate and of national character, under all the changes of government, and in all the stages of civilization, from the rude condition of savage life, to the most elevated state of elegance and refinement. Had any venturous theorist in the age of the Prophet been endowed with all the political knowledge, which, in the most favourable times, has ever been attained by the wisest and the most experienced ; had he been acquainted with all the ages that were to come, and penetrated with uncommon sagacity into the nature of all future polities ; had he revolved within his mind all the practicable combinations of mankind, all the capabilities of social life ; and then, had he been

been called forth to pronounce upon the possibility of the continued existence of a people in such an extraordinary condition, he must have decided in the negative; he must have declared it to be contradictory to the ruling principles of civil society, and inconsistent with the general nature of man.

In vain then will the Infidel endeavour to discover any principles of human wisdom, which could have encouraged an impostor, in the age of Moses, to predict the present condition of his countrymen. I have been induced to expatiate upon this Prophecy, because it is evidently of a nature so singularly striking, as to be calculated, in an uncommon degree, to subdue the incredulity of the Infidel, and confirm the faith of the Christian. For when we revolve in our minds, that it was delivered in the early ages of the world, and has received its completion in these latter days; that the greatest achievements of the human race, the rise and fall of the most illustrious empires, and the most momentous revolutions in the state of civil society, have intervened between its delivery and its

its final accomplishment ; that the condition described was contrary to the experience not only of all the times that had passed, but of all that have since elapsed ; and was in direct opposition to one of the most striking features in the character of the people, and even to a fundamental principle in the Jewish dispensation : that the continuance of such a condition seemed to be precluded by circumstances, of which some were absolutely foretold, and others might probably occur ; and moreover, being apparently incompatible with the general course of human affairs, must have been considered as morally impossible :—when we bring these strong considerations to our minds, and then reflect, that the condition was as fully, clearly, and precisely foretold by Moses, as it could now be described by the historian, we discern herein such an instance of foreknowledge, as can only be supposed to proceed from the inspiration of that omniscient Being, to whom the future is as clear as the past, and in whose sight a thousand years are but as one day. It bears in all its parts the most manifest signs of a divine origin, and is unquestionably the Revelation of the high and mighty

One, who inhabiteth eternity. For, in the bold and eloquent language of the great leader of Israel, we may “ask now of the days that are past, which were before us, since the day, that God created man upon the earth ; and we may ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it.”

I shall conclude the present Lecture with some observations resulting from the subject, which has been now under discussion.

The miraculous nature of the situation, in which the Jews are placed, might perhaps be intended by the great Disposer of all human events, as an additional and most powerful incentive to faith. In order to aid the imperfections of his creatures, he may graciously have ordained, that the people, through whom his divine will has been revealed, should be distinguished, through their whole history, by remarkable deviations from the ordinary course of their fellow creatures. The ancient Prophets, in order to impress the Israelites with an entire conviction of their divine mission, frequently accom-

accompañed their solemn revelations with an act of preternatural power. In conformity with the same principle, it may benevolently be designed, that the modern Christian should be roused to a bolder confidence in his Religion, by beholding, as it were, a continued miracle ^y displayed on its behalf.

The present astonishing condition of the Jews is further calculated to strengthen and illustrate the testimonies, recorded in the

^y One of the principal human causes of the continuance of the Jews in a distinct state will be found in the expectation of their Messiah, which they still fondly cherish. But surely this expectation cannot destroy the supernatural character, which their dispersion exhibits. The cause is not equal to the effect. Can we conceive it possible upon principles merely human, that a people would continue to endure through two thousand years the heaviest and most extraordinary calamities, which have ever been brought upon any nation, merely from the expectation of attaining at length a state of temporal prosperity? But whatever may have been the influence of this cause in former times, it is now considerably diminished by their repeated disappointments in all the periods, at which they expected the Messiah: So far, however, is it from weakening the force of the predictions relating to the Jews, that it actually strengthens and confirms them. For it was clearly and forcibly foretold by the Prophets, and is itself, therefore, a decisive proof of their real inspiration.

sacred annals, of a more immediate display of signs and mighty wonders in their favour during ancient times. Though we no longer view the water bursting from the rock, or the land enveloped at noon in the gloomy shades of night; yet we cannot but implicitly assent to the testimony of such supernatural appearances, when we see the whole Jewish nation now existing under circumstances inexplicable by human causes, and opposite to all the established principles of society.

Again, it may be graciously intended for our benefit, that, in the present distressful state of the chosen people, we should behold an example of divine justice faithfully coinciding with our natural conceptions respecting the attributes of the Deity. The more forcible were their incentives to duty, the more heinous has been their crime of disobedience. The more signal were the favours once indulged to them, the more severe, it is natural to expect, would be the punishment, with which their aggravated guilt should be visited. If the great powers of nature were miraculously diverted from their course, for the sake of animating

animating and confirming their faith; it is not surprising, that the laws of social life should cease to operate, and the natural feelings of benevolence be suspended, in order that an extraordinary vengeance may be taken upon them, for the crucifixion of the Lord of life, and for their long and stubborn rejection of his Gospel. If once, while placed under the solemn trial of fidelity to their God, they appeared among mankind with his glory visibly displayed before their armies, and awfully present in their temple, it surely is consistent with the plan of divine justice, that, after a lengthened course of rebellion and iniquity, they should be exposed to the view of the human race, manifestly impressed with the mark of his displeasure. This singular condition, I have said, may be intended for our admonition. The suffering Jew is a sensible and most solemn example to the careless Christian and the hardened Infidel. If upon the favoured people such a severe punishment has been inflicted, the world at large can have no reasonable hope of escape. The guilt of their incredulity was aggravated in proportion as their means of knowledge were more abundant. And

let him, who now perversely turns away from the volume of divine Revelation, while he beholds their calamity, reflect upon its cause, and prudently endeavour to know the things that belong unto his peace, before they shall be finally hidden from his eyes.

But if erroneous explications are not given of those parts of the Prophecies respecting the Jewish people, which have not yet been fulfilled, we must necessarily conclude, that Providence has yet another grand design in continuing them in so singular a condition. The same Almighty Voice, which pronounced that they should not be confounded with the nations, among which they would be scattered, has also declared, if we may venture to affix a full and precise meaning to the words of unaccomplished Prophecy, that, at a distant period of time, when their sufferings should have ceased, they shall be triumphantly restored to the land of their fathers. If such an alteration of their worldly fortunes has been decreed in the counsels of the Almighty, and is actually disclosed in the Revelations of his Prophets, in the peculiarity

liarity of their present condition we ² discern the effectual and, perhaps, the only human means, by which the accomplishment of the prediction may be brought to pass. They are not confounded and lost among the inhabitants of the countries, over which they have been dispersed. They have not acquired any local dominion, which they might be unwilling to relinquish. They possess not in general any fixed property, the desire of retaining which might attach them too closely to their present habitations. They have no settled country, to which they might be bound by the strong ties of natural affection. On the contrary, through every region of the habitable globe, they are waiting as it were in expectation of the mighty event. When the ensign of Jehovah shall be erected ¹, and the Gentiles shall press forward to bear them on their shoulders to Jerusalem ^b, they will be ready to start forth on the joyful occasion, to unite with vigour and alacrity in the hallowed cause?

^a See Clarke's *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*. Sect. xiv.

^a *Isaiah xi. 12.*

^b *Isaiah xlix. 22.*

and, when re-admitted into their earthly Canaan, and restored to the favour of their God, to bring to a final accomplishment one of the last in the long train of wonderful predictions, which were delivered by their Prophets of old.

S E R M O N . V.

ISAIAH xxx. 10.

PROPHESY NOT UNTO US RIGHT THINGS,
SPEAK UNTO US SMOOTH THINGS, PRO-
PHESY DECEITS.

TO judge of the prophetic writings by the habits and sentiments which now prevail, is the most dangerous error, into which the student in sacred literature can fall. The enemies of Christianity, sensible of the advantages, which result from such an uncandid trial of the ancient Prophets, have artfully spoken of them with a reference to the customs, the learning, and the spirit of these later times. It may with confidence be maintained, that their inde-
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cent ridicule and authoritative assertions will gradually lose their effect, in proportion as our knowledge increases of the age and situation of the Prophets. We must permit ourselves to be carried back into ancient times. We must imagine ourselves to be placed in the situation of Moses, of Daniel, and of Isaiah. We must, as it were, convey ourselves amongst their countrymen, adopt their manners, glow with their sentiments, and even imbibe their prejudices. That we may fully enjoy the splendid productions of genius, with which Greece and Rome were enriched, we explore with laborious accuracy the minutest traits of character, which distinguish those illustrious nations. Let the most important circumstances relating to the Hebrew tribes be examined with equal industry and zeal, and the champion of Infidelity will soon be compelled to relinquish his presumptuous hopes of triumph. But we too often neglect to contemplate the real agency of a supernatural power, the sublime and interesting manifestation of angels and of God, with the attention and the earnestness, which we bestow on subjects

jects merely human; the fallies of idle ambition, and the fictions of a bold imagination.

If we apply these general observations to the particular subject, which it is my intention in this Lecture to discuss, it will be found, that the removal of objections is not the only benefit, which we are capable of deriving from an intimate acquaintance with sacred antiquity. By an enlarged knowledge of the real situation of the Prophets, we are frequently enabled to discover additional testimonies in favour of their divine mission. Some of the predictions recorded in the Old Testament are so inconsistent with the motives, which uniformly actuate mankind, so opposite to those, which might naturally be expected from the character of the persons, who delivered them, if we consider those persons as impostors, and so utterly irreconcileable, upon mere human principles, with the situations in which the Prophets were placed, that we cannot conceive them to have been given to the world, except in obedience to the declared will of its almighty Ruler. The holy men of old could

could not have adopted the prophetic character, in order to promote their worldly interests, and conciliate the favour of mankind; because their predictions, from the extraordinary nature of the subject, were often peculiarly calculated to frustrate schemes of human policy, and to excite the discontent and indignation of the hearers.

In the former Lectures I have considered the events foretold as remote, circumstantially delineated, novel, numerous, exactly coinciding with the predictions, and in a very high degree improbable in the ages of the respective Prophets. On the present occasion, it is my intention to shew, that they were frequently UNFAVOURABLE, in the highest degree, to all those interested DESIGNS, the prosecution of which must unquestionably be the first and greatest object of IMPOSTORS. This position I hope to illustrate and establish, by a series of examples, selected from the Volume of divine inspiration.

The great leader of Israel, when he had delivered the laws to his countrymen, and finished

finished the labours, which he was especially appointed to accomplish, predicted, that, in a future age, their God would raise up among their brethren a Prophet like unto himself, who would be charged to communicate his almighty will, and would be entitled to their implicit belief and obedience, on pain of his most severe displeasure. The Prophecy, according to the application even of an inspired Apostle, referred immediately to the Messiah, at whose appearance the authority of Moses was superseded, the obligation of his law ceased, and all the inhabitants of the globe were admitted to an equal participation of divine favour, with the chosen descendants of Abraham. Now let it be supposed, that Moses was unconscious of the full extent of the prediction, and let us attend only to the literal sense of his words, which they must necessarily have borne at the moment of their delivery: we shall surely be obliged to confess, that though admirably chosen, upon the supposition of a divine inspiration, as an effectual preservative against the rejection of any future messenger or new covenant, in consequence of the prejudices of the people,

ple, yet, considered solely in an 'human point of view, they were most unfavourable to the cause, to which the Prophet had been entirely devoted, and directly opposite to every known dictate of nature and policy.

It has been the great object of all founders of states and empires, to give stability to their institutions, by guarding them against the rashness of future innovators. For this end, they have generally advanced their own authority, as far as it has been possible, above that of their ambitious descendants. When the Spartan lawgiver had completely formed his republic, he bound the citizens by an oath to maintain its constitution inviolate till his return. He departed, and never more was seen. The pretended Prophet of Arabia declared himself the final messenger of the Almighty; and thus endeavoured effectually to secure his religion from the dangerous pretensions of succeeding impostors. So powerful in general is this ambitious wish among legislators, that it has prevailed over the fascinating allurements of dominion, and sometimes even over the love of life.

Lycurgus,

Lycurgus, as I have just observed, retired to voluntary banishment and solitude; and, in conformity with the same principle, the celebrated founder of the Northern kingdoms is represented in their fabulous histories as having plunged the sword into his own breast.

From this general principle, the prediction of Moses can alone perhaps be excepted. The great object of his exertions had been attained. He had conducted the Israelites to the borders of the promised land. From the mountains of Pisgah he had shewn them the fruitful vales of Palestine, in which they were to repose after their long and painful wanderings. He was venerated by his countrymen as their deliverer from servitude, as the founder of their kingdom, and as the messenger of their God. His character had been sanctioned by the most awful manifestations of omnipotent Power; and his laws had been solemnly received as the will of Heaven. The moment of his death approached; and he was about to bequeath his establishment, as a sacred deposit, to the care of future generations. Yet, far from hallowing

ing that establishment, by imputing an unrivalled sanctity to his own character, or commanding himself to posterity as the sole favourite of the Almighty, he predicted the coming of a Prophet, whose authority should resemble his own. Far from pronouncing a curse upon those, who should transfer their obedience to another, he even foreshewed to them a future chief, whose mandates they would be bound to obey. In consequence of this prediction, his own pre-eminence was diminished by the expectation of the future Prophet: and an opportunity was afforded to impostors, who might hereafter found their impious pretensions even upon the perverted authority of his own prophetic evidence. In every other instance, he had carefully provided for the security of the laws, which he had delivered; and had branded with the infamy of imposture all those, who should presume to violate that sacred frame of civil and religious polity, which, with such visible and awful proofs of divine approbation, he had firmly constituted among his countrymen.

In this prediction alone his conduct was
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in direct opposition as well to his own general principles of action, as to the uniform tenor of example.

I am aware that this prediction has been considered by some interpreters, as expressive of the succession of Prophets in Israel. But though it may be satisfactorily proved, that such a meaning was, at least, neither the sole nor the primary one intended by Moses; yet, even to those, who adopt such a confined interpretation, the argument, which has been urged, will be scarcely less forcible. Under such circumstances, it would have been the policy of a deceiver to represent the succeeding Prophets as subservient to himself, and as inferior agents employed in support of his institution. He would neither have admitted them to a complete equality, nor denounced tremendous threats against those, who should not implicitly hearken to their voice.

Of a similar nature with the prediction of Moses, relating to the advent of the Messiah, are the Prophecies of Daniel and of Zechariah respecting the final destruction of the temple of Jerusalem. The

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Jews had been languishing through seventy years in a distant captivity: their country had lain in desolation, and their temple in ruins; while the opulence and splendour, which the sanctuary had derived from the munificence of former sovereigns, had long since been transferred to the temples and palaces of their conquerors. They had returned to the ruins of Sion; and, by the permission of the Persian monarch, were rebuilding the house of their God. At the commencement of every great undertaking, it is customary, and perhaps natural, to indulge the mind with imaginary hopes of its future importance and celebrity. When the foundations of the Roman capitol were laid, the empire of the world was promised. Upon the present occasion every encouragement was required. The people were few in number, depressed and impoverished by captivity, and obstructed in their pious work by the malicious arts of the Samaritans. So humble, indeed, was the general expectation respecting the new edifice, that amidst the songs and rejoicings, with which the work was commenced, the tears of regret burst involuntarily from the eyes of the aged, at the

the recollection of that more glorious temple, which had formerly been erected by an united and prosperous nation, which had exhausted the treasures of their two most powerful monarchs, and to provide materials for which whole armies had been employed amidst the forests of Lebanon. Above all, the glory of the Divine presence, and other sensible marks of a supernatural interposition of the supreme Being, which had imparted an awful sanctity to the first building, could not with certainty be expected, and in reality did not afterwards appear.

Thus the returning exiles seemed to require every possible encouragement in the prosecution of their holy work. Daniel was fully sensible of the necessity of such encouragement; and in the prayer, which he piously preferred at the termination of the captivity, he ardently petitioned the Almighty to look upon the desolations of his people; to pity, and to forgive; to turn away his anger and his fury from his city Jerusalem, and from his holy mountain, and to cause his face to shine upon his desolated sanctuary. These were the

sentiments congenial with the situation of the Jews, and best calculated to animate them in the prosecution of their work. So strong, indeed, was the necessity of such an encouragement, that the same divine Power, who had so long displayed his omniscience in the cause of his chosen Israelites, again interfered in their favour^a; and made the last communications of Prophecy under the Mosaic dispensation, for the purpose of accelerating the completion of his holy temple.

What then can be conceived more improbable, and more opposite to true policy, and the common dictates of reason, than that the destruction of this very temple, and of the city, in which it was erected; the final cessation of the religious rites, with which it was to be hallowed; the triumphant entry of a destroying enemy, together with a most lively and tremendous scene of complete devaftation, should be predicted, in that particular season, in which the pile was about to be erected? Yet the prediction was ut-

^a Haggai ii. 7, 9. See also several passages in the writings of the three last of the minor Prophets.

tered;

tered; and it was uttered by men the most interested in promoting the work; obscurely even in Jerusalem by ^b Zechariah, who was more especially employed to overlook and inspirit the Jews; and in the clearest and most forcible terms, in the capital of the empire, by ^c Daniel, the favourite of successive Eastern monarchs, through whose powerful intercession his countrymen were released from captivity, and permitted to recover their ancient city, and restore their ruined temple.

The greater part of the Prophecies of Daniel, indeed, are as singular in the nature of their subjects, as in the exactness of their agreement with subsequent events. The whole tenor of his predictions respecting the empire and monarchs of Babylon, if they be minutely explored, will be eminently illustrative of the position, which has been advanced. To convey unpleasing truths to royal ears, has been always an irksome and too often a neglected duty. The frequent ignorance of sovereigns, even upon subjects connected with their dearest

^b Zechariah xi. 1, 2.

^c Daniel ix. 26, 27.

interests, is a fact of general notoriety. The instances, wherein a liberal and manly intercourse has prevailed between the monarch and his ministers, may be naturally expected, and will most frequently be found throughout the western portion of the globe; among kingdoms, where the royal authority has been happily blended with a spirit of rational freedom; and in the ages of refinement and science, when the actions and sentiments even of the most exalted characters in the community become the subjects of an open and candid enquiry. But it must not be expected in the vast empires of the East, where imperial power degenerated into the most wanton and inexorable despotism, and where the obedience of the subject was degraded into the most abject servitude, and an almost impious adoration. To the caprice of tyranny, to the fury of disappointment, to the gloom of mortified authority, or to the pangs of jealous apprehension, the faithful counsellor might be precipitately sacrificed, who possessed the boldness to unfold, what the sovereign might be afraid or unwilling to hear. Hence we may observe in the annals of the East, that in the progress of plots

plots or invasions, of domestic conspiracies, or popular insurrections, the emperors were in general long retained in ignorance ; and frequently lost their diadems and their lives, from the want of faithful and confidential communications. How little then ought we to expect, that a youthful foreigner, brought in ignominious captivity to Babylon from a distant and unimportant province, should boldly communicate the most unfavourable intelligence to the monarch, even at the moment, in which a capricious and sanguinary decree had gone forth, for the utter extirmination of the Chaldean magicians and astrologers ! Flattering hopes and delusive promises would have been the natural subjects of imposture on an occasion so pregnant with danger. Far from adopting this principle of worldly policy, Daniel did not even confine his solemn communications to approaching calamities : looking forward into distant futurity, he disclosed the fall of the Babylonian empire, a subject peculiarly offensive to the pride and ambition of the monarch.

In pursuing the history of this Prophet,

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we discover during our progress the same extraordinary characteristics in his predictions. When advanced to the highest state of authority and royal favour, we hear him at one time foretel the degrading personal humiliation of his imperial patron ^a; at another, in accurate and circumstantial details, enlarge upon the final ruin of the kingdom, which he governed, and upon the fame and prosperity of succeeding empires ^c. These are subjects, which even a pious man, when inspired by his Maker, could scarcely have entered upon without some degree of apprehension, and which would have been avoided with the most scrupulous care by an impostor. Some of the early fathers, from a mistaken interpretation of the holy Scriptures, believed that the Antichrist of the Prophets represented the Roman emperors. But, though they had been incensed by frequent and most cruel persecutions, and though they courageously preferred the bitter sufferings of martyrdom to the renunciation of their religion; yet they were unwilling wantonly to provoke their imperial persecutors, by so

^a Daniel iv. 25.

^c Daniel vii. 3—8.

severe

severe an application of the divine Oracles, and in general were silent upon the subject. Josephus, when he introduced into his Antiquities an interpretation of the Prophecies of Daniel respecting the four great empires of the world, was silent upon the nature of the fifth, which was destined to rise upon the ruins of those, that should precede it; and was represented under the image of a stone cut out of the mountain without hands. Josephus was protected by the Romans; their kingdom was doomed to be broken to pieces by the stone; and, though even the immediate inspiration of the Deity ^f had revealed the explanation, he would not venture to repeat it^g. When the Poet and the Orator were anxious to flatter the pride of the Roman citizens, they employed the loftiest conceptions of their genius, in ascribing extent and durability to the empire. In the elevated language, in which the Eastern sovereigns were uniformly addressed, the boundless extent and eternal duration of their dominion were usually selected as the fairest subjects of panegyric and adulation.

^f Daniel ii. 19.

^g Joseph. Antiq. l. x. c. x. sect. 4. p. 457.

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Such is the conduct usually adopted by mankind in situations like those in which the Jewish Prophet was placed. But no interested considerations decided the actions of Daniel. His unwelcome predictions, so opposite to the maxims of policy and to the authority of general example, could only have proceeded from the influence of divine inspiration, or from the wild ebullitions of insanity. The latter supposition is totally irreconcileable with the established character and dignified situation of the Prophet. There is a wonderful consistency in the whole history of Daniel. It was the same magnanimity, the same undaunted resolution, superior to the allurements of interest, and even to the terrors of death, which displayed itself in the cause of divine truth, when, to avoid the crime of idolatry, he entered the lions' den ; and when, in obedience to the will of his God, he hazarded the resentment of the greatest monarch of the world.

I cannot refrain from adding one instance more, in confirmation of the argument from the writings of the Prophet, who has already occupied so much of our atten-

attention. After the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, Daniel appears to have been received with respect and favour by the conqueror. Through his interest with the new Sovereign, the captivity was terminated, and his countrymen were permitted to return to Jerusalem. Yet within a very short time after the accession of Cyrus to the throne of Babylon, the Prophet foretold the ruin of his empire, and the glory of the kingdom which was to be exalted by its fall. Such a communication, at all times in the highest degree unpleasing, at that particular season must have been productive of real danger, and was peculiarly calculated to fill the mind of the conqueror with jealousy and apprehension. Among a vanquished people, hardly beginning to reconcile themselves to their new yoke, what circumstance would be more likely to cherish an unsettled temper of mind, and to excite commotions and dangerous expectations of a change, than the delivery of Prophecies concerning the final overthrow of the empire? And who could be so unlikely to utter such Prophecies, as the principal minister of the vanquished monarch, who was received into the favour and

and protection of the conqueror, and whose former celebrity in divination, and exalted station in the empire, must have conferred a dangerous authority on his supposed development of futurity? No principles of human policy, no suggestions even of the most ordinary prudence, can possibly account for such conduct. It appears to be strikingly demonstrative of the interposition of the high and omniscient Director of the world, the God, as he is expressly called, of Daniel, who is the living God, and stedfast for ever, whose kingdom is that which shall not be destroyed, and whose dominion shall be even unto the end.

To the instances already adduced, may be added the still more striking example, exhibited in the predictions so frequently and fully delivered, concerning the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles. That the time should ever arrive, in which the especial protection of the Almighty would be entirely withdrawn from his favoured people, was the most unwelcome intelligence which could be conveyed to the ears of a Jew. But that the Gentiles should be admitted to the blessings, which would

would then be no longer enjoyed by his nation, must have been a circumstance peculiarly aggravating, and calculated to excite his utmost indignation and resentment. The Jews had, in the earliest periods of their history, been selected as the favoured people of God. With them he had established an especial covenant. He directed their temporal affairs, and had instituted their sacred rites. The annals of their nation were ennobled and sanctified, as it were, by innumerable instances of his wonderful acts of omnipotence. The plains of Palestine had frequently been visited by his heavenly messengers; and all the scenes, which were there presented to the view, had been consecrated by visions and by miracles. This continued experience of the indulgence of Heaven to their tribes had a pernicious influence on the disposition of the people. They were induced to consider themselves as exalted above the other inhabitants of the earth, and became proud, selfish, and contemptuous. Their highest hopes and warmest feelings of glory arose from this exclusive claim to the Divine favour; and, in consequence of this pleasing expectation, they contemplated the future celebrity

celebrity of their tribes, with fonder partiality, perhaps, and a more ardent enthusiasm, than has ever been indulged by heroes or patriots, in the sanguine anticipation of their favourite schemes of fame and empire.

Their abhorrence of other nations was proportioned to their bigotted attachment to their own. This aversion was heightened, and in some degree even sanctioned, by peculiar circumstances, necessarily arising from the general nature of their religious œconomy. The system of entire separation, which had been commanded by Heaven, while it eventually gave birth to the arrogant feelings of a fancied superiority, filled them also with contempt for the neglected votaries of Polytheism.

To a people inspired with these sentiments, no subject can be conceived more ungrateful, than the assurance of their own rejection from the Divine favour, and of the adoption of Heathen idolaters. A scene of things entirely the reverse, the final depression of Infidels, and the triumphant exaltation of Judea, would have been the natural

natural theme of impostors. It is difficult to suppose that a Jew, in the ages of the Prophets, unaided by Divine inspiration, could have brought his imagination to conceive as possible the present astonishing situation of the Jewish and Christian world. But it is absolutely incredible, that a deceiver, even if he had admitted the situation to be probable, would have selected it as the subject of his delusive Oracles. Yet the Prophets not only conceived the possibility of the change, but in the strongest and most precise terms repeatedly foretold it. And some of the loftiest conceptions, which have ever animated the human mind, were employed in giving weight and energy to the unwelcome assurance.

The particular time fixed for the accomplishment of these extraordinary Prophecies was as hostile to the preconceived opinions of the Jews, as the humiliating event so expressly foretold. The advent of the Messiah was the æra, to which they looked forward with pride and joyful expectation. All their national institutions seemed to them to be formed with a view to the appearance of this exalted personage.

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This expectation was their pride in prosperity, and their consolation in defeat; and at one period of their history it preserved their national spirit, and perhaps their very existence as a people, during the desolation of their native territory, and the ignominious captivity of its inhabitants. Their own erroneous interpretations of Prophecy had inflamed their imaginations with the most romantic hopes of triumph and celebrity. Glowing with the fond conception, they ardently desired to see the salvation of Israel, and acknowledge their destined Deliverer; and they had filled the whole world with the anticipated fame of the extraordinary Personage. Yet this signal æra was fixed by their Prophets for their loss of the partial protection of Heaven, and for the re-admission of Heathen nations to the Divine favour. Where are the principles of human policy, which can reasonably account for the prediction? No parallel, or even distant resemblance, can be discovered among the effusions of the Heathen Oracles. It was never declared to the Romans by their Sibyls, that, in the completion of their most ardent wishes, and the accomplishment of their lofty scheme

scheme of universal dominion, they would find only their ruin and their shame. When the enterprising Macedonian presented himself at the cave of the Priests, he was not informed that, by a final decree of the gods, his glory, when it should arrive at its height, and the time of enjoyment approach, would be terminated by a premature death, and that his empire would be violently dismembered almost at the moment of its birth. To divine inspiration alone, then, can it be ascribed, that the foreknowledge of a state of human affairs so peculiarly ungrateful was manifested by the Jewish Prophets; and that the particular season was marked for its commencement, the choice of which was directly adverse to the accomplishment of all those interested designs, which can induce an impostor to assume the prophetic office.

Many of the characteristics, which the Jewish Prophets assigned to their expected Messiah, are equally inexplicable, unless we allow them to have been actually inspired by God. They dwelt with peculiar distinctness upon his rejection by his countrymen, his humiliation, his sufferings, and

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his ignominious death. The earnest expectations of an extraordinary personage, as I have already observed, had prevailed among the Jews through every period of their history. They had fired their imagination with the most romantic hopes of a temporal sovereign, who would exalt their nation by the splendour of his triumphs, and the extent of his dominion, and under whose banners the idolatrous kingdoms of the earth would bow down before their victorious tribes.

Now had the expectation of such a deliverer originated in uncertain tradition, and been preserved merely by national prejudice; and had the Prophets, availing themselves of the delusion, employed it as an instrument in imposing upon popular credulity, they would surely have limited their predictions to such circumstances respecting him, as would be attended with splendour and glory. Yet they adopted no such limitation, but spoke as fully of the less splendid parts of his character, his abasement, afflictions, and ignominious death, as of the divine excellencies with which he was visibly adorned, and of his exaltation.

exaltation and final triumph over hell and the grave.

I ventured to assert, in the beginning of this Discourse, that the subjects of many important predictions could not, except upon the presumption of Divine Revelation, be reconciled with the situation of the Prophets, by whom they were delivered. The examples, which have been adduced, are abundantly sufficient to confirm this position; and, though I have expatiated but upon few, a variety might be added from the sacred Volume, in which they universally abound.

Though the impious pretenders to inspiration in Israel and Judah, were constantly uttering the most grateful but delusive oracles; and though the ignorant and vicious multitude were repeatedly soliciting the Prophets of God not to prophesy right things, but to speak smooth things, and prophesy deceit; yet those holy men, in a manly spirit of firmness and integrity, regardless of the nature of the predictions, repeated with fidelity whatever

was revealed by the Divine Inspirer; and so generally unfavourable were the communications which they made, that they were subjected thereby, through the long course of their sacred ministry, to the constant reproach and resentment both of the princes and the people.

Was it the policy of an impostor, to appear, like the man of God, before the altar at Bethel, and expose his life to the rage of the suspicious Jeroboam?

Was it the policy of an impostor, to declare in the name of Heaven, like Elijah, in consequence of an injury offered to a private individual, the tremendous punishment of the immoral and impious family of Ahab, who had polluted themselves with blood in the prosecution of their unjust designs?

Was it the policy of an impostor, when two powerful monarchs were marching forth at the head of a formidable army, and all the numerous priests of Astarte had gratified them with promises of success and glory, like

like Micaiah, alone to predict misfortune and defeat, at the hazard of imprisonment, and even of death.

A deceiver would not, like Elijah, have foretold the approaching death of an impious king; nor, like Jeremiah, have predicted the captivity and afflictions of his sovereign; especially at a moment when he had incurred the perilous suspicion of favouring the cause of the enemy.

A deceiver would not, like Nathan, have denounced a heavy judgment for a single crime, though even of the deepest die, against one of the most moral and pious, as well as the most prosperous and highly favoured of all the kings of Judah.

A deceiver would not, like Isaiah, have foreshewn to the good and pious Hezekiah the approaching ruin of his kingdom, on account of the apparently trifling offence, of ostentatiously exposing his treasures to the view of the Babylonian messengers.

What but the over-ruling spirit of God could have guided the Prophet of Moab,

when, disregarding the most splendid allurements, in opposition to the interests of his nation, to his own ardent wishes, and to the repeated and peremptory commands of his sovereign, he foretold in the clearest, fullest, and most eloquent terms, the prosperity and fame of the unknown and hostile armies of Israel ?

What but the agency of a superior Power could have induced the Prophets to urge the inefficacy of ceremonial rites, and even to fix the period of their final abolition, though at the same time they strenuously exerted their divine authority, to retain their countrymen in a faithful observance of the Mosaic law, and perpetually represented it both as the gift and command of their God ?

Isaiah predicted the restoration of genuine piety in Egypt, and the establishment of an intimate religious connection between that country and Judea. Now, whether we consider the Prophecy as describing the temporary prevalence of Judaism under the favour of one of the later Ptolemies, or the conversion of the Egyptian people

people to Christianity in a subsequent age, it cannot be satisfactorily accounted for upon any of the ordinary motives which influence mankind. All the Prophets anxiously laboured to effect a continuance of the entire separation, which subsisted between the two countries ; while Isaiah in particular exerted the utmost force of his divine eloquence in dissuading his countrymen from reposing confidence in the Egyptians ; and, in prosecution of this design, they repeatedly delineated, in the most striking colours, the heavy calamities, to which that devoted nation was doomed.

When Cyrus entered Babylon, the Jewish Prophecies were submitted to his inspection. In them, the Lord, the God of Israël, is represented as forming the light, and creating darkness. Now Light and Darkness were the two presiding deities in the magian superstition, in which Cyrus had been educated. If, therefore, the Prophecies of Isaiah were not really the Revelations of Heaven delivered in a preceding age, but forgeries executed at the moment for purposes of deception, is it in the slightest degree probable, that such a de-

scription of the Almighty would have been invented for the sake of conciliating the favour of the conqueror, as was in the highest degree likely to produce an opposite effect, to provoke his indignation, and to render him, even upon religious principles, hostile to the cause of the Jews?

When the time of the crucifixion approached, and the disciples of our Saviour were about to be disheartened and perplexed by the apparent ruin of their cause, in the strongest and most impressive manner he prophetically delineated their approaching persecutions. He represented to them, that they were destined to the most heavy calamities, which human nature can endure; not only to prisons, to stripes, and to death, but to the general hatred of mankind, to the apostasy and treachery of their friends, and, what is perhaps the greatest of all human trials, even to a general spirit of indifference, among their brethren, respecting their common cause. Surely the spirit of truth, and a certain prescience of the efficacy of the divine assistance, with which he intended to support them, could alone have prompted him

him to make such an unwelcome representation, at a moment, when every encouragement was required. An impostor, in commending a pretended revelation to the zeal of his deluded followers, would have endeavoured to fire their imaginations by expatiating upon its final triumph, and delineating in the brightest colours scenes of permanent prosperity and splendour: while the intermediate difficulties, to which its propagation might appear to be subject, would have been either entirely omitted, or represented in the weakest and most general terms, as unworthy of the serious consideration of sincere and able supporters.

Though we are unable, in these numerous instances, to reconcile the subjects of the predictions with any motives of human artifice; yet, if we admit the Prophets to have been commissioned by the Lord, the God of Heaven, their communications will appear perfectly consonant with that high and holy character. They constantly declared themselves to be the messengers of the Most High; and it is absolutely incredible, that they would have uttered such extraordinary Prophecies, as those, which

which they frequently delivered, if his divine Spirit had not really over-ruled and guided their wills. When our Saviour condescended to answer the accusation of the Pharisees, who ascribed his miracles to a demoniacal agency, he overthrew the blasphemous objection, by shewing the utter inconsistency of the pure and holy doctrine, for the establishment of which his supernatural works were wrought, with the pernicious principles, which a Demon must necessarily labour to inculcate. In like manner, we may reply with boldness to the modern Infidel, who arrogantly pronounces all Prophecy to be the offspring of deception, that the subjects of many of the sacred Oracles were totally irreconcileable with the purpose of a deceiver. If the supposition of their imposture be admitted, they inevitably tended to alienate the affections of the hearers, and to injure the cause, which they were intended to support. " My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," said the Lord of hosts to his chosen people of old. Most strikingly is this sublime sentiment illustrated in the peculiar nature of many of the subjects selected by the ancient

cient Prophets. Far removed from the ways and thoughts of man, from the contracted views of human policy, and from the petty artifices of imposture, they exhibit this clear and forcible evidence, that they originated in the counsels of the Almighty, and were delivered in obedience to his revealed will.

S E R M O N VI.

ACTS xv. 18.

KNOWN UNTO GOD ARE ALL HIS WORKS
FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD.

To judge of the truth of Revelation by the dogmas, which the pride of human reason invents ; to assume arbitrary principles, and to reject or admit the narrations, the doctrines, and the evidences contained in the sacred Writings, as they are found to be more or less consistent with those principles, is a practice at once arrogant and dangerous in the extreme. We thereby endeavour to set bounds to the acts of the Almighty, to reduce the high powers of Divine wisdom to a level with the contracted intellect of man, to controul and give

give laws to Omnipotence. It is not surprising, that a practice so contrary to the natural dictates of reason should be the parent of Scepticism and Infidelity. The philosopher presumptuously determines, what the conduct and the doctrines of his Maker ought to be ; and if the conduct and the doctrines, recorded in the volume of Revelation, do not coincide with his preconceived opinion, even though they be sanctioned by preternatural testimonies, which he cannot fairly disprove, he rejects them as unreasonable and unworthy of belief. This pernicious error will be found, upon examination, to be one chief cause of the increased prevalence of Deism. It is the stone, on which the pretended philosophers of the present age have fatally stumbled.

Though there are first principles, from which we may venture, without presumption, to believe that the Almighty will not deviate ; yet they are few and simple : and whenever he appears to depart from any one of them, it becomes us not, on that account, arrogantly to reject his revelation : we ought rather, with earnestness and

and humility, to seek the cause of the deviation in the exercise of some other of his divine attributes, in conformity with which, in the instance under consideration, from the peculiar circumstances of the case, he in his wisdom may have acted.

Let it not be supposed, that I wish to exclude the exercise of reason on the subject of revelation. Far otherwise. It is the principal characteristic of Christianity, the mark by which it is peculiarly distinguished from all other religions, that it submits its precepts and evidences to the cool and impartial judgment of mankind. Some of its doctrines are above, but none are contrary to reason. It is the abuse and not the use of this faculty, which is condemned. The Christian teacher solicits his hearers to decide in favour of the Gospel, by the dictates of their sober judgment. The more accurately the several parts of our Religion shall be examined, with a sincere desire of acquiring a knowledge of the truth, the more clearly will the admirable propriety and excellence of the whole be discerned.

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In any great work, the fitness of a variety of important parts is an indubitable evidence of design. The justness and mutual connection of the several members of the universe are visible testimonies of an all-wise and omnipotent Creator. When Galen had examined with accuracy the formation of the human frame, struck with the admirable propriety and mutual agreement of all its members, he acknowledged it to be at once the work and the proof of a God. In the same manner, from the suitableness of the different parts of the great scheme of Prophecy, we may reasonably infer the necessity of an inspiring and overruling Mind.

By casting our eye over the sacred pages, and bringing within our view the most striking circumstances, illustrative of this observation, we shall be supplied with a forcible argument in support of the inspiration of the Prophets.

In prosecuting this enquiry, we must not allow ourselves presumptuously to assume arbitrary principles. We must bear continually in our recollection what was the

the real intention of Prophecy, as that intention has been graciously communicated to us in the sacred Writings. We ought then to examine whether a **CONSISTENCY** can be discovered in the several parts. And finally, with diligence and impartiality, we should endeavour to determine, whether such a consistency is not a visible proof of **DESIGN**; and whether it is either reasonable, or even possible, to suppose, that it could really have been attained, unless the extraordinary persons, by whom the scheme was gradually unfolded, had been assisted by a divine Inspirer.

In my former Discourses I have been chiefly employed in examining the most striking characteristics of several particular predictions: let us now direct our enquiries by more comprehensive principles, and consider the general system of Prophecy at large.

In approaching to this discussion, we must call to our remembrance the design of the Almighty, in raising up his holy Prophets. In the early ages of the world, he established a double covenant with his chosen

chosen people; the one temporal, and confined to themselves; the other spiritual, and extended to all mankind. By the first he promised a particular interference, during a considerable period of time, in the affairs of the Israelites: by the second, a general redemption of the whole human race. In conformity with these promises, the Prophets were commissioned to preserve among the Jews a full conviction of the more immediate interposition of God in their present government; and also to excite in their minds an earnest expectation of the future Deliverer, and prepare the way for his coming. These were the general duties of their ministry, the great outlines of their high commission.

In the proposed examination of the consistency, which distinguishes the writings of the Prophets, it is my intention to consider, first, the circumstances connected with the complex nature of the prophetic office, and afterwards those, which referred solely to the benevolent redemption, which was ultimately intended.

When we reflect upon the twofold nature

ture of the prophetic office, we may reasonably imagine, that the spirit of Prophecy would be displayed with uncommon lustre in those periods of the Jewish history, in which the people were more strongly tempted to forego the expectation of the future Deliverer, and, renouncing the worship of Jehovah, to bow before the altars of the Heathen gods.

The perusal of the sacred Writings will confirm this reasonable presumption.

Even in the ages, which preceded the establishment of the Mosaic law, the benevolent Creator appears to have provided for his creatures, by these express means, the aid more immediately required by the pressure of circumstances at particular times.

When man had incurred by sin the forfeiture of his blissful condition, and was doomed to sorrows and to death, the promise of future restoration was peculiarly required, to alleviate the severity of the sentence, to banish the fatal effects of despair, and to maintain religion in the world. In

that melancholy hour it was graciously imparted.

At the time of the deluge, and through the first of the succeeding ages, no spiritual promise was renewed; the visible interposition of God in that awful miracle having necessarily made a deep impression upon the minds of the few survivors, and of their immediate descendants.

When mankind again multiplied; and the holy Patriarchs were surrounded by a corrupt and idolatrous world, they were secured from the contagion by the assurances of Prophecy, and the promise of an universal blessing to mankind through their seed.

When their descendants were about to be oppressed in a strange land, and to be allured by universal example to the worship of the Egyptian idols, not only the precise period of their sufferings was predicted, and the future glories of their tribes foreshewn, but; though in obscure terms, the coming of Shiloh was graciously promised, and the blessing was assured to Judah. On the other hand, during the theocracy,

cracy, between the times of Moses and of the establishment of the royal authority, when the power of Omnipotence was sufficiently manifested by signs and mighty wonders, and by a frequent display of Prophecy upon temporal subjects as an instrument of divine government; during that wonderful period hardly any intimation was given of the exalted Personage, in whom all the nations of the earth were ultimately to be blessed.

The fidelity of David was rewarded by a plainer and fuller communication of the Divine purpose respecting the future Redeemer. Soon after his times, when the days of vengeance were at hand, when the arm of the Almighty was terribly stretched forth, and the people, exposed to his dreadful resentment, were trembling before an irresistible enemy, or languishing in distant captivity; and when, overpowered by such tremendous calamities, they were in danger of being tempted to renounce the God, by whom they were apparently forsaken, and to fly for succour to the idols, by whom they seemed to be subdued; then the prophetic power was more particularly exerted to re-

animate their confidence and restore their hope, to convince them that the Almighty was still their protector, and that they were suffering not from the prevailing ascendancy of any other God, but under the just indignation of their own. The ages of adversity were more particularly the ages of Prophecy. In such seasons, not only the temporal sufferings of the Israelites were accurately and fully foretold, but the picture of the Messiah and of his kingdom was drawn with an astonishing degree of minuteness, spirit, and splendour. Thus the predictions of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, of Ezekiel, and of Daniel, were delivered in seasons of apprehension, dismay, and desolation, amidst the impotence of defeat, and the anguish and despondence of lengthened captivity.

This subordinate design of the holy Spirit, so manifest through the long course of Divine inspiration, displayed itself in a most striking manner, in one signal instance, at the close of Jewish Prophecy. The inhabitants of Judah had returned from captivity in poverty and weakness: restoring their ruined temple, they were dispirited and

and discouraged by the manifest inferiority of the new building to the former pile, the magnificent work of Solomon. At this season of despondence, the promise of the Messiah was graciously renewed; and a mighty addition of dignity was afforded to the rising temple, by an anticipation of the splendour and solemnity, which it should derive, in a future age, from the presence of the blessed Son of God.

Even the suspension of Prophecy during the long period, which intervened between Malachi and the Baptist, affords a strong confirmation of the principle, which has been advanced. The Jewish character, in one most important point, had undergone, during the captivity in Babylon, a total alteration. The ardour for Idolatry and for the forbidden rites of Polytheism, which had been the cause, through many preceding generations, of so much guilt and woe, was entirely extinguished. From that signal æra the Jews persevered in a firm, though sometimes mistaken, attachment to the precepts and ritual of the law. As they were, therefore, no longer in danger of apostasy, there was no farther necessity

of invigorating their confidence and re-animating their piety, by occasional renewals of the divine promise. In conformity with this unprecedented situation of the Jews, we find, that the spirit of Prophecy ceased, and was never after exercised in aid of the Mosaic polity.

From this short review of the prophetic history, it is evident, that these gracious communications were more especially imparted at particular seasons, according to a fixed principle for the attainment of a particular end. To the unprejudiced enquirer it must appear morally impossible, that, in a variety of predictions, delivered through a long period of time, such an intention could be made so clearly and strongly to appear, if the predictions had been ~~enthusiastically~~ and incoherently uttered, and no design whatever had been intended. Chance could not have produced so certain an indication of system.

But though the expectation of a Messiah, the constant theme of the divine predictions, must, when fully excited, have been peculiarly calculated to preserve a people,

people, even under the most calamitous distresses, in a faithful adherence to the supreme Being, from whom the promised blessings were to flow; yet the simple assurance of these blessings, when unattended with any visible proof of a divine interposition, would not have been capable of completely producing the desired effect. Promises of so extraordinary a kind ought to be accompanied by circumstances, which may impress the mind with astonishment, and produce a rational conviction of the certainty of their accomplishment. Now the miraculous powers, which were presented to the view of the Israelites, were adapted, beyond any other means which the human imagination can devise, to sanction the predictions of the Prophets, and to keep alive among the people a firm expectation of the promised blessing. In the later period of the Jewish history, the repeated accomplishments of former predictions, in all the most important and many of the most minute events, which occurred in their respective ages, became an additional and no less decisive testimony to the truth of divine inspiration. The Prophecy fulfilled, as well as the Miracle

racle performed, was a pledge and earnest of the future completion of the mighty promise, which was the ultimate end and design of all Revelation.

In perusing the sacred Volume, we not only behold the authority of Prophecy supported by the peculiar nature of the different means adopted by the Prophets, but we behold these means each more particularly employed in that period of the history, in which it was singularly beneficial and appropriate.

In the infant state of the world, in which Prophecy could not yet have acquired that high degree of authority which is obtained by the frequent accomplishment of former predictions, miracles were most frequently employed. When the Children of Israel, departing from Egypt, were encouraged, in their revolt against a foreign tyrant, and during their painful and dangerous progress through the wilderness, by the splendid and repeated promises of divine Revelation, then, the necessity of their implicit reliance upon these promises being more immediately urgent, a long series of miracles was

ex-

exhibited, the most stupendous, which the human imagination can conceive.

When, in a later age, the calamities of the Israelites were multiplied, and even their utter extinction sometimes appeared to be approaching, extraordinary Prophets were more frequently raised up ; who, for the purpose of upholding the faith of the people, were commissioned to describe in fuller, more distinct, and more glowing terms, the character of the Messiah, and the future glories of his kingdom. But, as the divine government had been carried on, through a long succession of years, chiefly by the agency of Prophets ; and as almost every event which took place was the accomplishment of a former prediction, miracles were no longer necessary for the purpose of confirming the promises of the Prophets, and establishing the faith of the hearers. Accordingly few miracles appear to have been performed. Though events the most momentous occurred ; though the city and temple of Jerusalem were destroyed, and the Jews were carried into distant captivity, and after long exile returned to their ancient land ; yet no wonderful

derful acts of Omnipotence were exerted in their behalf; neither was the stream commanded to flow from the dry and barren rock, nor were the waters of the Euphrates divided.

But though such frequent advantages were derived from the communications of the Prophets to the generations, to which they were respectively addressed; yet to deliver those communications in distinct and completely intelligible terms, was neither necessary for the important purpose of which I have been speaking, nor consistent with the peculiar nature of the system, under which the Prophets and their hearers lived. Some of the most stubborn difficulties, which appear to perplex the argument from Prophecy, and which the Infidel exaggerates with pride and exultation, are not only capable of a satisfactory solution, but may even reasonably be expected from this twofold nature of the Prophetic œconomy. Of this kind is the obscurity, in which the predictions are frequently involved. In assigning the cause of this obscurity, it is not sufficient that we should expatiate upon the freedom of human agency,

agency, by which alone many of the predictions were to receive their accomplishment, and which would have been fatally interrupted by a clear discovery of future events. It must be presumed, that such an obscurity would necessarily be admitted by men, or rather by the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of men, who were the ministers of a twofold dispensation, who were employed at once to maintain the honour of one œconomy, and to prepare the way for another; and with whom, consequently, it must have been a ruling principle of action, not to weaken the authority of that which was present, by too clear and splendid a display of the superior excellence of that which was to come. A considerable degree of obscurity, therefore, appears to be naturally connected with such a scheme of Prophecy; and in most of the predictions it will be found. They were admirably calculated to give exercise to faith, and encouragement to hope: but they were not sufficiently luminous to alienate affection from the prevailing system, to excite impatience, or to nourish discontent.

The

The means employed for the purpose of veiling from the Jews a part of the prophetic scheme of Christianity, appear to have been admirably suited to the occasion, upon which they were used, and to the peculiar nature of the administration, of which the Prophets formed a part. The double meanings, which many of the predictions convey, naturally result from this double office of the Prophets. Employed upon two dispensations, it might naturally be supposed, that they would frequently intermingle them ; that, though speaking more particularly upon the first, they would look forward to the second, and hold it constantly in view ; that, glowing with the twofold conception, they would confound in one picture dissimilar images, which could never unite in a single person, or a single event ; and would represent by one expression such circumstances common to both, as may not unreasonably be expected to occur in two œconomies, subservient the one to the other, both proceeding from the same God, and both conduced to the same end.

But the types and figures, with which the Mosaic establishment and the sacred history

history of the Jews universally abound, seem more particularly to fall in with the professed design of the Almighty Ruler of that people. The last great dispensation, whereby the whole human race has been raised to life and immortality, was ushered in by an inferior one, which was administered, through many ages, under the immediate guidance of the Deity, and was principally subservient to the purpose of introducing that, by which it was succeeded. Now it may be fairly supposed, under such circumstances, that the first would be intimately connected with the second; that it would manifest its entire dependence by types and figures, a mode of expressing ideas, which was in common use among eastern nations in those early ages of the world, and was peculiarly adapted to veil the prophetic system in partial obscurity. The less Judaism had been interwoven with Christianity, by this inseparable community of images, the weaker would have been its influence upon the mind, and the more faintly would it have appeared an institution of the same God, in subordination to the same design. But the Jewish polity was in a great degree typical. The law,

law, and more especially the ceremonial part of it, was prophetic of the Gospel; and from these unalienable characteristics it evidently appears, that they both proceeded from one Almighty Power, and that he was acting upon the same harmonious plan, when he shone before Moses upon Sinai, and when he poured his glory around our Redeemer upon the Mount.

The above observations will appear perhaps even more striking, if we recollect, that the Gospel dispensation was final; that it prepared not the way, nor looked forward to any other. It was not necessary, therefore, to have recourse to typical ceremonies, or secondary senses, either in its institutions, or in the predictions delivered by its holy Founder and his inspired Apostles. Consequently no traces of them will be found in the New Testament, if we except the remarkable instance of a double meaning in the Prophecy of our Lord, in which he intermingled the destruction of Jerusalēm with the general judgment of the world.

In the course of my observations upon double

double meanings in Prophecies, with a reference to the particular subject which is now under discussion, I ought not to be entirely silent upon the peculiarity of the language, in which they are in general conveyed. It not only is not vague, romantic, and ridiculous, unworthy of the attention of a rational being, as the ignorant and superficial Infidel has wished to represent it; but it is sober and reasonable, reducible to determinate principles, and capable of a satisfactory explication. It is in most instances highly figurative, and frequently hyperbolical. As it is neither necessary, nor consistent with my plan, to enter at large into this discussion, I shall briefly observe, that to those who have seriously considered the peculiar nature of the subject, such a language has appeared singularly appropriate and useful, if not absolutely necessary. It has even been doubted whether the end proposed could have been effectually obtained through the medium of any other style. And this style, so consistent with the views of the Prophets, was particularly adopted by them in those predictions, in which they intermingled some important event, which was remote,

with the nearer transaction, which was the more immediate subject of their divine communication.

Before I quit the consideration of the twofold nature of the prophetic commission, let me be allowed to offer a few observations upon one peculiar circumstance, connected with the predictions of the Old Testament.

In the trial of the prophetic writings, that high species of evidence in favour of real inspiration, which results from a faithful accomplishment of the predicted events, is the most satisfactory which the human mind is capable of receiving. The predictions were not indiscriminately fulfilled. Those, of which the accomplishment was indispensably necessary, have been faithfully completed; while, in some few instances, the events foretold have not occurred. In these cases, nevertheless, the delivery and the revocation of the Divine will appear to have been equally consistent with that comprehensive scheme of Revelation, which it was the great object of Prophecy to assist, to illustrate, and to confirm. In subservience

vience to this scheme, the Jews, I have already observed, were placed under the more immediate and visible direction of God. The Prophets were his high ministers in dispensing this sacred government. One of the principal means, by which they at once convinced the people of his miraculous interposition in their favour, and most powerfully incited them to faith and a pious obedience, was the prophetic anticipation of the calamities which would follow their crimes, and of the blessings which would crown their piety. These rewards and punishments not taking place at the moment when the predictions were uttered, it may reasonably be presumed, that the ultimate purposes of the Almighty could not be expressed, as they must have depended upon contingencies, which might ensue, between the delivery of the Prophecies, and the period of their intended completion. The threatened calamity might be averted by repentance: the promised blessing might be forfeited by intermediate guilt. In conformity with this presumption, which is inseparable from a just knowledge of the Jewish œconomy, it will appear from a minute investigation, that all

the Prophecies, which were not verified by the events, were delivered as a species either of commination or of encouragement; and that they were rendered void, by a subsequent change of conduct in the people to whom they were addressed.

Let it not however be supposed, that the defender of Christianity enumerates, without any just means of discrimination, among the immediate instruments of the theocratic government, all those Prophecies, which have not been duly fulfilled. The clearest and most striking distinctions may be discerned. They generally referred to approaching events, and were always expressed in a language completely intelligible to the hearers. Being intended as inducements to action, it was absolutely necessary that they should be clearly apprehended by the agents. On the other hand, all those Prophecies, eminently superior in number and importance, the accomplishment of which was certain, were distinguished by higher characteristics. Either they were concealed from the full knowledge of the hearers, under the veil of a highly figurative language, and of types and secondary meanings;

meanings; or they contained an accurate detail of minute circumstances; or were repeated by successive Prophets; or they were sanctioned by an oath, or confirmed by a miracle; or they exceeded the probable force of second causes; or they related to the destruction of idolatrous kingdoms, and the fall of future empires; or they referred to spiritual blessings, and shadowed out the great features of universal redemption. These characteristic distinctions, made by one of the strongest and most sagacious minds ^a, which has ever been employed in elucidating the subject of Prophecy, sufficiently prove, that the predictions were not the wild effusions of enthusiasm, or the rash speculations of conjecture; that they were delivered in strict conformity with fixed principles; and that the friend of Revelation does not without just reason refer to the class of conditional Prophecies, all those, in which the event has not corresponded with the description of the Prophet.

An additional authority may be afforded

^a Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, book ii. chap. 6.

to these observations, by recurring, as at the conclusion of the last argument, to the writings of the New Testament. When the Messiah appeared, the Almighty had ceased to direct, by a miraculous interference, any favoured portion of his creatures. Conditional Prophecies were no longer requisite, as the appropriate and useful instruments of a divine government. Accordingly, no conditional prophecies appear to have been uttered after the days of Malachi. Not a single prediction was delivered, either by Christ, or by his first inspired ministers, of which it can be shewn, that the necessary time of completion has passed, and left it unaccomplished.

But leaving the considerations which arise from the double nature of the dispensation, of which the Prophets were the ministers, let us now proceed upon more enlarged principles, and direct our enquiries to some of the general characteristics of the prophetic scheme.

It was the principal end and design of divine inspiration, to bear testimony to the truth of Christianity. This being the great object,

object, preeminently intended by the Omnipotent Inspirer, it may naturally be supposed, that the prefiguration of the Divine Founder of the new religion, and of the new religion itself, would form the distinguishing feature of the sacred Oracles. It would occupy, we may reasonably expect, the most distinguished place in the sacred Writings, be held forth continually in view, and pervade and animate all the system. The actual proceedings of the Prophets accord with this reasonable expectation. The blessed Jesus and his divine religion were the constant subjects of their predictions. Secondary circumstances were incidentally mentioned; but our holy Redeemer was the favourite theme of all, from the opening of the revelation at the fall of man, to the close of Jewish Prophecy with Malachi. Even the minutest traits respecting him were accurately distinguished. His entire history may be collected with almost equal precision from the Hebrew Scriptures, and from the writings of the Evangelists. If we should expunge from the Old Testament all the passages which relate to his advent and religion, the remaining part would.

would abound with a profusion of predictions, which, though singularly striking in themselves, would be deprived of their bond of connection, and would not conduce to any end of general and transcendent importance.

Since sacred Prophecy has proposed, as the final cause of its delivery, the illustration of a single and most momentous event, it may be presumed, that the scattered predictions will collectively compose one uniform and harmonious scheme. Bearing this circumstance in our recollection, let us endeavour briefly to develope, in a few striking instances, the system of the sacred writers. They all unite in one common design of raising the expectation of a great and benevolent redemption. The most extraordinary circumstances, by which it was to be attended, are variously and minutely pourtrayed. The prophetic delineation, general and indeterminate at its commencement, gradually assumes a fuller and more distinct character, as the time of its fulfilment approaches. The spirit of Prophecy first displayed itself at the introduction of sin:

sin: it closed its heavenly career, when the power of sin was broken in the triumphant establishment of Christianity. The temporal events which it pourtrayed, the achievements of celebrated monarchs, and the revolutions of mighty empires, were all more immediately concerned in favouring the progress of Revelation. The false pretenders to inspiration may in vain lay claim to this incontrovertible testimony of an over-ruling influence. The predictions of the Pagan oracles were independent of each other, and utterly incapable of uniting in one grand and connected system. Sacred Prophecy alone combines its several parts in one perfect whole. The merciful spirit of redemption breathes through every page of the Prophets, and imparts the same beauty and harmonious agreement to their numerous writings, which natural law and order, as willed by the Almighty, bestow upon the vast and multiform system of the universe.

A series of Prophecies, of which it is the great object to disclose all the illustrious distinctions of one extraordinary person, in whom they will receive their full and final accom-

accomplishment, if it be made to comprehend a wider range of circumstances, will exhibit a greater degree of consistency and unity of design, in proportion as it confines itself to those, which are in some degree connected with his appearance. Other human events, though eminently important in the history of mankind, if they are independent of this primary intention of the omniscient Inspirer, will, we may justly suppose, be passed over in silence.

If we recur, as in the early part of this Lecture, to a brief examination of the Prophetic History, we shall find that this reasonable expectation most faithfully coincides with the actual character of Jewish Prophecy.

In its infant state, it was imparted to a few humble and pious Patriarchs, then wandering with their flocks over the East. But they were the appointed founders of an extraordinary people, among whom the scheme of redemption was to be gradually unfolded; and at length, in the fulness of time, the Messiah was to appear.

At

At a more advanced period, when the descendants of these favoured Patriarchs had multiplied into a numerous and powerful nation, and, conducted by the arm of the Almighty, were miraculously settled in the promised land, the prophetic spirit exerted itself, as a powerful instrument of theocracy, both in encouraging their faithful adherence to the Mosaic establishment, and in favouring their martial enterprizes against the idolatrous nations which surrounded them.

When, corrupted by success, and devoted to idolatry, they were severed by the avenging arm of the Almighty into two separate and hostile kingdoms, the power of Prophecy was more particularly displayed among the two tribes which were settled around Jerusalem; for they were the more faithful adherents to the religion of their fathers, and the immediate progenitors of the Saviour of mankind.

In pursuing their history, we discover, that the vices of the Israelites multiplied, and the heaviest calamities approached. The scheme of Prophecy was enlarged.

To

To the desponding inhabitants of Judah, either sinking under a victorious enemy, or languishing in captivity, was foretold the ultimate ruin of the neighbouring kingdoms and empires, then triumphant over the people of the Lord, and exulting in the fancied strength of their own idols. The doom of nations powerful and opulent was irrevocably determined ; of Tyre, of Moab, and of Assyria ; of Egypt, the mother of science ; and of Babylon, the haughty mistress of the eastern world.

The time of the Messiah approached. The seed of Abraham had nearly completed their part in the wonderful preparation for his advent. Prophecy now forsook the contracted limits of the East, and, revealing the disposition of human affairs most suitable to this stupendous event, foreshewed the elevation of those vast empires, which facilitated the progress of Christianity.

The victorious Macedonian, by extending his conquests from the Ionian shores to the banks of Indus and the ocean, was the principal means of introducing, through the

the most considerable part of his immense empire, the knowledge of a language the most perfect and the most general, which has ever been used by mankind. It was through the medium of this common language, that, in the age of the Ptolemies, the sacred history recorded in the Law and the Prophets was laid open to the whole Gentile world, and, in a subsequent æra, the Apostles, sent forth by our Lord, universally disseminated the knowledge of a Redeemer, and the joyful tidings of his Gospel.

The domination of Rome, so strikingly predicted by Daniel, which extended over all the civilized portion of the globe, produced that arrangement of sublunary affairs, which alone, perhaps, as human means, could have essentially favoured the wide diffusion of Christianity. The various nations of the earth were all united by one common band : an universal toleration was indulged to all religions : the intercourse of strangers was facilitated and encouraged : not only the progress of the first teachers of the Gospel was expedited, but the necessary correspondence between the numerous

merous societies of scattered Christians was maintained by the vast Roman roads, which had been formed for the passage of the legions, and united the banks of the Danube to the coasts of the Mediterranean, and the confines of Parthia and Egypt to the shores of the Atlantic.

At length Christianity was received as the common Religion of the world, wherever civilization prevailed, and the Roman arms had been displayed. Thus, finally triumphant, it became independent of monarchs and of empires. All the predictions, therefore, which regarded the times subsequent to this period, if we except those relating to the fall of the empire, an event more immediately connected with the first propagation of Christianity, neglecting temporal occurrences, the fortune of sovereigns, or the fate of kingdoms, appear to have referred solely to the spiritual condition of mankind. The Prophets were silent upon many of the most wonderful changes, which have taken place in later ages; the singular species of power acquired by nautical science, the founding of a powerful empire over the regions of the

the North, the discovery of another hemisphere, the introduction of civilization and the arts among the savages of extensive islands, which had lain concealed through all past time in the great Southern Ocean, and the stupendous revolutions instantaneously effected over the whole East, the great scene of Revelation, by the descent of myriads of northern barbarians under the sanguinary standards of Zingis and Timour. Our attention is confined to the triumphs of the Arabian Impostor, to the monstrous corruptions of the Papal usurpation, to the apostasy of later times, to the unparalleled and awful calamities of the Jews, and to the universal propagation of Christianity, and the final consummation of all things in the second appearance of Christ, a triumphant and glorified Messiah.

Having enumerated some of the most striking circumstances attending sacred Prophecy, as they referred to the objects respectively pursued in the course of Revelation, I wish, before I conclude the present Lecture, to direct your attention for a short time to one distinguishing characteristic,

teristic, by which it is indispensably requisite, that the real Prophets should be marked.

The ministers of a true revelation, even the adversaries of Christianity must allow, will be distinguished by a constant enforcement of the purest principles of morality and religion. When our assent to it is demanded, it is not sufficient, that the proofs of a supernatural agency be clearly adduced ; it must also appear, that the cause of piety and virtue, and the general welfare of mankind, are either immediately or ultimately promoted by the divine communications. An agency more than human may lie, perhaps, within the ability of evil spirits, who may wish to favour, by such means, their malignant plans of wickedness and misery. Perfect rectitude of principle, therefore, is necessarily required in the holy men, who declare themselves to be appointed the messengers of the Most High, and to be endued with extraordinary prescience.

In referring to the Oracles of Paganism, we soon discover, that the ministers of the delusive superstitions of the world were singularly

singularly defective in this unerring test of the truth. It was their principal object to decide the temporal fortunes of individuals, and to give energy to the designs of national policy. Precepts of morality and rules of just conduct were seldom delivered from the cave or consecrated tripos. The purest sentiments prevalent among the Pagans either were enforced by the Philosopher, or adorned the pages of the Poet. When calamity threatened either the state or the individual, if the Oracle was solicited to reveal the cause, which had provoked the anger of the gods, the evil, on most occasions, was declared to arise, not from flagrant breaches of morality, from profligacy of sentiment, or depravity of conduct; but from a trifling neglect of the external duties of religion, or from the unworthy jealousies of contending deities, or from the inauspicious omens, which had immediately preceded an enterprize.

But happy had it been for the Heathen world, if, upon the subject of morality, their Oracles had been invariably silent. The few sentiments, which they did deliver, were not always grounded upon the se-

vere principles of reason and truth: they varied with the fluctuation of human opinions, and were even accommodated to the prejudices, the passions, and the vices of their votaries. Nay, they frequently even commanded the grossest violations of morality and decorum, and veiled, under the prostituted name of religion, the most flagitious and horrible abominations, which have ever been permitted to pollute the annals of the human race.

The Prophets of the true God were inspired by the purest principles. They actively and invariably exerted themselves in the cause of virtue. The system of morality, which they sanctioned, was pure, severe, and founded upon determinate and acknowledged principles. They tempered its severity, however, with the love of mercy and the gentle feelings of benevolence. With all the warmth of zeal, and energy of eloquence, they recommended the cause of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan. Neither the pomp of station nor the tyranny of power could shield the offender from their manly and indignant rebukes: and exhibiting a boldness, which, perhaps,

perhaps, is unparalleled in the whole history of mankind, and which could only be inspired by the confidence of truth and the certainty of Divine assistance, they even chastised a powerful monarch for the unlawful indulgence of his passions; and openly denounced the vengeance of the high Being, by whom they were inspired, against a formidable tyrant, who had murdered, for the sake of plunder, the poor possessor of a neighbouring vineyard.

The piety, which they required, was not the cold and inefficient duty of an external ritual; it was the religion of the heart, the controul of the internal feelings of the soul, and an inward and ever-active persuasion of the existence and providence of an all-judging God. It earnestly excited gratitude for his favours, supplication for his forgiveness, and reliance on his protection.

These moral and religious duties were not varied with the progress of civilization, nor made to bend to temporal occurrences, to the will of a favoured monarch, or the caprices of contending parties. They were independent of human events, regular as the order of nature, and eternal as the

Fountain of inspiration. Their influence was the most extensive which the imagination can conceive. They were not calculated to aggrandize a favourite state, nor appropriated to the inhabitants of a particular climate; but they were equally useful to all countries, and obligatory on the whole human race.

In estimating the excellence of the moral principle inculcated by the supposed ministers of superior beings, considerable attention is due to their descriptions of the exalted Power, whose will they pretend to reveal. Unworthy representations of the supreme Being degrade the sentiments and vitiate the heart; while pure and exalted conceptions of his divine nature are eminently calculated to refine the moral sense. And let us not forget, that they alone can be reasonably supposed to have been the real ministers of Heaven, who ascribe complete perfection to the divine Person, in whom is comprehended every excellence, which it is possible for the human mind to conceive.

The Pagan deities, from the humble rank of mortals, had been elevated to the honours

honours of divinity, either by the gratitude of an ignorant and superstitious antiquity, or by the impious adulation of a corrupt court. Their earthly characters had been sullied by the blackest crimes; and they were represented as still debased by human infirmities, and as enjoying, in imaginary regions, a boundless indulgence of the most impious and destructive vices. The government of the universe was supposed not to be directed by one inspiring mind, nor carried on by one unvaried principle, but to be distributed among a multiplicity of deities, who were actuated by jealousies, provoked by animosities, and divided by contending interests. The common happiness of mankind, and the sacred cause of virtue, appear to have been, in general, remote from their consideration, and disregarded in their conduct: while in the honours, which they demanded, they countenanced the grossest impurities, and not unfrequently delighted even in the effusion of human blood.

But let us turn from this unpleasing picture, and contemplate the Jehovah of the Hebrews. The Prophets of Israel, in a

strain of divine eloquence, present a description of the Godhead, far purer and more sublime than any, which the unassisted human mind has ever conceived. He is described as the one supreme Being, existing from all eternity, present through all space, possessing all power, and knowing all things, past and present and to come. He is represented as spiritual in his nature, the maker and the preserver of the universe, the constant friend of virtue, and the certain avenger of vice. He delighteth not, they explicitly declare, in the odours of incense, nor in the blood of victims, but in uprightness of conduct and purity of sentiment, in acts of benevolence, and in the duties of warm and unassuming piety.

In the course of the present Lecture, I have endeavoured to shew the consistency, which runs through ancient Prophecy. It seems scarcely possible not to admit the reality of these characteristics, when we recollect the several parts of the subject, which have just been discussed. The predictions were mostly delivered at those seasons, in which the subordinate advantage intended

intended to be derived, at the instant of their delivery, was more particularly obtained. For the more certain attainment of this advantage, miracles were necessary for the confirmation of the words of the Prophets: and miracles were exhibited, not indiscriminately in all seasons, but in those chiefly, in which such a confirmation of the words of the Prophet was more especially required. It was necessary to veil for a time the sense of many Prophecies from the knowledge of those, to whom they were addressed. They were veiled; and the means by which this temporary concealment was generally effected, secondary meanings and types, were adapted with singular propriety to the complex nature of the dispensation, of which the Prophets were the ministers. It was in the highest degree probable, from the particular design of one part of the Revelation, that some of the predictions would not be verified by the events. This revocation of the declared purposes of the divine Inspirer took place, but in those alone in which the necessary reason can be assigned. The one sole and momentous object, the testimony of the blessed Saviour of the world, was kept perpetually

Pagan countries. They have generally been heard with considerable attention, and not unfrequently have been protected and encouraged, through a long course of time, by the laws and by the magistrate. Yet in none of their effusions can the faintest traces be discovered of a connected plan, or of unity of design, much less of such a plan and such a design, as are exhibited in the sacred Writings. The priests of Greece and Rome, who perhaps advanced the art of divination to the highest state of perfection, to which it can be carried by mere human ability, uttered a profusion of Oracles, which were totally unconnected with each other, and had no relation towards the attainment of any common end.

The Sibylline books, which, in the moment of general calamity, the magistrates of the Roman republic affected to consult, had they been such as were pretended, would have approached nearer than any other compositions, with which we are acquainted, to the character of the inspired Writings. The citizens were deluded into an opinion, that those volumes contained a species of information, which implied a confi-

considerable foreknowledge of the history of Rome; and that they were designed for the instruction of the future magistrate, and the consequent preservation of the state. Here then would have been congruity of parts and a momentous end. But the whole was a fiction. We can discover no reasonable grounds of belief, that the books contained the information, which was artfully pretended. The tale respecting them was invented, from political motives, in the infancy of Rome, and was continued through succeeding ages as an useful engine of state, in appeasing the fears of the populace, during seasons of tumult and dismay, and affording a religious sanction to the extraordinary decrees of the civil power. Had they really contained such information, though they would undoubtedly have appeared to be in a very high degree miraculous, yet from the knowledge, which we have been enabled to acquire respecting them from the Roman historians, we may venture to pronounce, that in the strong and discriminating characteristics, which have been the subjects of discussion in the present Discourse, they would

would still have sunk in a comparison with the inspired writings of the Prophets.

The vast scheme of sacred Prophecy was formed for the sublime purpose of revealing remote events. It was not disclosed by the successful efforts of a favoured individual, richly endowed by nature, and highly improved by cultivation. The Prophets, through whose agency it was gradually unfolded, were many in number: they appear not in general to have been distinguished by uncommon superiority of intellect; and they assuredly were not assisted by a fortunate disposition of human affairs. They arose through successive generations; and uttered their predictions under the most violent reverses of fortune, and the most striking variations of society. Sometimes they were invested with the dignity of an exalted station; sometimes they were dispirited and debased by an ignominious captivity. At one period of their ministry they were the founders of a kingdom; at another they mourned over the ruins of their fallen country. They were

were not associated^b into one body, controuled and directed by known and established rules. It does not appear, that the later Prophets were in all cases even admitted to a knowledge of the full intention of those who had preceded them: it is not evident, that they always comprehended the whole scope of their own predictions: and it may with confidence be afflerted, that in general they were not encouraged and supported by the protection and patronage of the state.

Such agents, considered as mere unaffisted men^c; we may boldly venture to de-

^b I speak of the extraordinary Prophets, who, as I have already had occasion to remark, though sometimes selected from the schools of the Prophets, were not connected in their ministry with that institution.

^c The following vigorous lines, in which Dryden has spoken of the Books of divine Revelation in general, may with peculiar justness be applied to the spirit of Prophecy in particular, which is displayed in them all:

Whence, but from Heaven, could men unskill'd in arts,
In several ages born, in several parts,
Weave such agreeing truths? or how, or why,
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?
Unask'd their pains, ungrateful their advice,
Starving their gain, and martyrdom their price.

RELIGIO LAICI.

clare,

clare, were totally incompetent to act in concert for purposes of transcendent importance, and to produce such a wonderful and perfect system of Prophecy, as that which the holy Scriptures exhibit. The propriety and beautiful consistency, which harmonize its varied parts, must have been the emanation of one inspiring Power, the great Disposer of all events. To his all-seeing mind were manifest from the beginning all the various parts of the stupendous scheme, which, in the progress of time, were successively unfolded to mortal knowledge. He went on from age to age, amidst the rise and fall of empires, and the fluctuations of his human instruments, in the regular prosecution of one predetermined and unaltered plan. And thus, the compositions of his Prophets, like all his wonderful productions, exhibit that unity of design, and harmony of parts, which it is equally impious and absurd to represent as the fortunate result of contingencies, or a successful effort of ingenious imposture.

SERMON

S E R M O N VII.

2 PETER i. 21.

PROPHECY CAME NOT IN OLD TIME BY THE
WILL OF MAN; BUT HOLY MEN OF GOD
SPEAKE AS THEY WERE MOVED BY THE
HOLY GHOST.

FEW subjects are more interesting to the mind, or require a more intense exertion of its discriminating powers, than the motives of human conduct. Curiosity, perpetually alive to researches of this nature, employs itself, where its sphere of action is confined, even in scrutinizing the occurrences of humble life, which, too insignificant to become objects of public enquiry, can only attract the notice or engage the attention of those, who are strangers to more im-

portant transactions. The political observer, not bounding his speculations within such contracted limits, analyses with subtlety of discrimination the public events, which are passing within his view, in order to explore the secret principles, which actuate courts and councils. The scholar, extending still wider his researches, and carrying his imagination back into distant ages, investigates the genuine character of an illustrious hero, and the real object of a memorable sect or party, which were concealed under the popular mask of patriotism or piety.

It is reasonable to suppose, that this principle will operate with increasing efficacy, in proportion as the object of investigation advances in singularity and importance.

The Hebrew Prophets exhibit an appearance perhaps the most extraordinary, which occurs in the annals of the human race. A series of individuals, rising almost without interruption through the most considerable part of the national history, assume a more than mortal character, determine with equal freedom upon the conduct

conduct of the humblest and the most exalted members of the community; and, laying claim to a miraculous knowledge of futurity, foretel the revolutions and the calamities, not only of their own state, but also of the most powerful and flourishing empires of the world.

An enquiry into the motives, by which they appear to have been actuated, is not merely calculated to gratify a barren curiosity, but may prove of eminent importance, and extensive utility. I shall endeavour, therefore, on the present occasion, to demonstrate, that there are no motives of worldly policy sufficient to render a satisfactory explanation of their conduct, as it is recorded in the writings of the Old Testament.

It was so singular in its nature, and so irreconcileable with all the known principles of action among deceivers, that it can only be justly accounted for by admitting the interposition of a divine agency, and the irresistible influence of an almighty and over-ruling Spirit.

If the scheme of Jewish Prophecy at
s large

large be not of divine origin, it must have been the offspring either of imposture or enthusiasm. In prosecuting our enquiries, it is absolutely necessary to shew, that neither of these causes could have operated.

If Prophecy was originally invented, and afterwards successfully continued, as an instrument of deception, it must have been intended to promote some human aim. It must have been conducted by the Prophets with the design either of giving energy to the political views of their countrymen, or traiterously aiding the enterprizes of their enemies; of conciliating the favour of the sovereign, or acquiring popularity among the multitude; or finally, of accumulating riches and advancing their temporal fortunes. It is scarcely possible to name any other human cause sufficiently weighty to account for their conduct.

The political impostor, though he may throw a veil of impenetrable obscurity over those secret arts, by which religion is made subservient to his views, must yet unfold, in the most explicit terms, the particular design,

design, to the prosecution of which he may labour to direct the public mind. That must always be a clear and striking feature in his compositions, notwithstanding the mysteries and studied perplexities, in which all the other parts may be involved. Thus the immediate conquest of enemies, or the predominance of a favoured faction, events, which it was their object to facilitate, were simply and boldly declared, by the ministers of the Greek and Roman Oracles, to be the predetermined will of the divine powers, by whom they pretended to be inspired.

Now the Hebrew Prophets rarely dwelt upon great political events, which should be favourable to their countrymen ; they never even alluded to domestic dissensions and civil animosities, except in those instances, in which they were occasioned by idolatry and a spirit of stubborn disobedience to the Lord of heaven and earth. They never complained of the disrespect of the people to their sovereign, of their inattention to the laws of their country, or of their refractory and mutinous spirit toward their military leaders in the camp. Their

threats were almost invariably confined to a single species of guilt, an ungrateful departure from the true God, and the consequent violation of his commandments.

The Oracles of Heathen antiquity were artfully employed, on the eve of a battle, in animating the courage of the soldiers, by predicting the defeat of their enemies. Very different was the conduct of the Prophets of God. It was not their principal object to expatiate upon the transactions, in which their cotemporaries will be engaged. In the instances, in which they alluded to approaching events, their Prophecies, as we have seen in a former Lecture, were generally in the highest degree unfavourable and alarming. But the energy of their divine eloquence was most frequently and most powerfully excited in revealing the occurrences of distant times, the remote ruin of enemies, which was to be accomplished by agents unconnected with the Jewish state. Now a foreknowledge of the distant fall of a victorious and irresistible enemy, though it might sooth the anguish of defeat, and lighten the chains of servitude, could not inspire present

sent confidence, or animate to immediate exertion.

While the rising glory and approaching prosperity of their own nation was the constant theme of the ministers of Heathen Oracles, the Hebrew Prophets promised to the remote posterity of their countrymen a period of uncommon felicity and grandeur; and at the same time dwelt with all the warmth and boldness of an eastern imagination, upon a long intermediate season of ruin, servitude, and dispersion, and of debasement and miseries, more bitter than even extinction and death.

In vain then shall we endeavour to ascribe to political motives the conduct of men, who were in general silent upon subjects merely political; who spoke rather of the ultimate destruction, than of the approaching misfortunes of enemies; who rarely pictured scenes of temporal felicity, of which the season was near, but constantly delineated in the most forcible manner the severe calamities, which impended over their countrymen.

A system of Prophecy, unfavourable to the prosperity of our own country, may not unreasonably be suspected of an intention to promote the cause of our enemies. If the Jewish predictions portended evil to the children of Israel, they might be intended to second the efforts of the hostile nations, by whom the Israelites were surrounded. This plausible supposition, though sometimes artfully enforced by the adversaries of Christianity, is contradictory to the general tenor of the most faithful records and of facts, which cannot be disputed. The sacred Prophets uniformly inveighed with the severest indignation against the idolatrous rites of all Heathen nations: they represented them as just objects of dread and abhorrence amongst men, and as exposed to the certain consequences of divine vengeance. This public avowal of determined disapprobation and hostility, constantly repeated, and not qualified by any intermingled expressions of partial praise or admiration, cannot be reconciled with any possible system of political hypocrisy, or of friendship concealed by the refinements of art.

Again,

Again, they frequently revealed the will of the Almighty, in which he purposed to effect, when the appointed time should arrive, the final ruin of all the enemies of the Jewish people. There was scarcely a kingdom connected with Israel or Judah, of which the desolation was not forcibly depicted by the holy Prophets. And where is the man, who, traitor to his native country, could hope to favour the successes of its enemies, by declaring their irremediable ruin, as determined in the counsels of the Most High, and as certain to be executed under his avenging hand? Though the Prophets, therefore, in numerous instances, foretold to the Jewish people the miseries, to which they were about to be exposed from the victorious arms of the surrounding kingdoms; yet they cannot justly be charged with betraying the interests of their country. Independently of the exact accordance of such a species of predictions with one principal object of their mission, the frequency and energy, with which they denounced the inevitable destruction of those very kingdoms, supply them with the most ample means of exculpation in the judgment of all sober and impartial enquirers.

enquirers. Though this accusation has often been preferred by our adversaries, I am not aware, that they have seriously endeavoured to substantiate it by examples, except in the single instance of the conduct of Jeremiah at the approach of the Babylonian army ^a. From the numerous examples of such a species of predictions recorded in the sacred Volume, only one has been selected, in which the attending circumstances allow the daring and licentious Infidel of modern times even plausibly to support his charge. The barrenness of the proofs must surely be admitted as an incontestable evidence of the weakness of the cause.

The favour of the monarch and the nobles is frequently solicited with earnestness by the ambitious and enterprizing members of the community. The efforts of genius have been often directed to this end. By conciliating such esteem, either vanity may be, gratified, or interest promoted. But by the predictions contained in the sacred Volume no object of this nature could possibly be attained. The Pro-

^a Jeremiah xxvi.

phets

phets uniformly arraigned with intrepid boldnes the immoralities or impiety of the sovereign, and predicted the awful punishments, which awaited such crimes. They exposed themselves in general to those expressions of bitter and inveterate hatred, with which the son of Imlah was received by the impious Ahab^b, whose resentment was avowedly excited by the habitual opposition, which he had experienced in his guilty career from the intrepid minister of Heaven. They assumed an authority superior to all earthly power. With a loftiness of conception, which mere human ability never yet has reached, they dwelt upon the instability and emptiness even of the highest state of temporal grandeur and dominion, in comparison with the inexpressible majesty of the Lord of heaven and earth. They approached the sacred person of the Prince with a freedom of manner, and manliness of address, which are rarely exhibited in palaces, and must have been peculiarly abhorrent from the haughty magnificence and fulsome adora-

^b 1 Kings xxii. 8.

tion,

tion, by which the dignity of eastern monarchs is uphelden.

That national prosperity may be advanced, and national calamity averted, by the ability of the sovereign, is a principle of flattery, which often prevails among subjects, and is fondly cherished by the rulers. But what hopes of princely favour or protection could reasonably be indulged by men, who constantly reproached their countrymen for their confidence in a mortal arm, and publicly predicted the ruin of imperial cities and extensive empires, unless averted by general repentance, and by the reliance of both prince and people upon the only true God ?

Even those few Prophecies, which may appear to have flattered the wishes of the monarch, were generally embittered by other less grateful communications. Though the forfeited life of David was spared in consequence of his sincere repentance, yet the death of his child was denounced by the Prophet. In like manner, when Isaiah was commissioned to

sooth

sooth the mind of Ahaz, by divine assurances of security, during the approaching invasion of Syria and Ephraim, he saddened the welcome intelligence by predicting the miseries of his subjects at a future period, in which they should be borne in captivity to the distant banks of the Euphrates.

He, who censures the sovereign, may wish to become the favourite of the people. To degrade by disrespect, or abuse the higher orders of the community, is not unfrequently an easy path to popular distinction and applause. But the Prophets of Israel were not inflamed with such depraved ambition. Their predictions were in general equally offensive to all orders of the state. To flatter the wishes of the multitude, to indulge them in their prejudices, to re-echo their sentiments, and to sacrifice even truth and virtue to their caprice and vicious inclinations, has been the uniform practice of factious demagogues. The great Athenian Orator most vigorously and successfully exposed these unmanly artifices, when he warned his countrymen against the specious declaimers, who profited

tituted the noblest effusions of genius to purposes of flattery and deceit. It was in a strain of captivating but insidious eloquence, that the false prophets of Israel addressed themselves to the evil passions of their hearers, and soothed their imaginations with pleasing but fanciful pictures of prosperity; gave them assurances of peace, when the banners of the enemy were unfurled; and promised serenity and sunshine, when the sky was already darkened by the clouds, and agitated by the whirlwind.

How different was the character of the real Prophets! Though peace and security were the ardent hope and fondest wish of their countrymen; yet to their cotemporaries and their immediate successors, they generally predicted severe calamities, and sometimes even inevitable ruin. The roll of the Prophet was written within and without, with lamentation, and mourning, and woe. The sorrows of defeat were embittered by anticipation; and slavery appeared with aggravated horrors in the mystic visions of futurity.

With

With equal freedom they declared themselves the irreconcileable enemies of idolatry. They represented it as an impious provocation of divine vengeance, degrading to the dignity both of the creature and the Creator. Yet the propensity of the Jews to idolatry was unconquerable. It was indulged in opposition to the declared will of God, and with a fearless defiance of his almighty power, even while they yet strongly retained in their memory innumerable instances of his miraculous acts both of mercy and of vengeance. It was indulged, while his sword was yet uplifted in their cause, and while the air was still tainted with the pestilence, which their former idolatries had provoked him to send. Yet notwithstanding the universal prevalence of this crime, the Prophets, neither publicly favouring, nor silently neglecting it, boldly held it forth as the constant object of their enmity. In their solemn addresses to the people, they inveighed against them as loaded with this particular species of iniquity, as degraded by superstition the darkest of errors, and blackened by ingratitude the basest of crimes. All the most loathsome and terrible images of nature

were

were selected, as resemblances both of their sin and their punishment. It is not surprising, that a race of Prophets, proceeding thus in determined opposition to the inveterate propensities of the multitude, far from attracting reverence or conciliating affection, should be constantly exposed to relentless persecutions, to mockery, to insult, and to death ; the objects of common malice and common detestation ; condemned by the rulers, and yet unpitied by the people ^c.

The candid enquirer will combat equal difficulties, if he endeavours to ascribe the conduct of the Prophets to the base desire of pecuniary advantages. It is by no means

^c Even the Infidel allows, that the Prophets of the Jewish people were exposed to the severest hardships. Alluding to these hardships, the Letters of certain Jews to M. de Voltaire contain the following sentence : " Even according to you (viz. Voltaire) most of these holy men reaped nothing from their labours, but the hatred of kings and the contempt of nations, persecution, exile, death. Vol. i. p. 398.

So general, indeed, and indubitable were the hardships endured by the Prophets, that they have been chosen by a modern Infidel, as one of the fairest subjects for the indulgence of scurrilous derision and low buffoonery. (See Philosophy of History.)

probable,

probable, that a succession of impostors should have continued their arts through so many ages without detection. Had the accumulation of wealth been the principal aim, to which their endeavours had been directed, who can believe, that we should discover among them those exalted personages, who were of all men the least likely to be allured by such unworthy and trifling emoluments? It cannot be supposed, that, under such circumstances, we should find in the number of the Prophets, Daniel, the favoured minister of the Babylonian monarch, Isaiah, distinguished by a noble and perhaps a royal birth, and David, the powerful and prosperous sovereign of Israel.

Again, Prophecy was exerted with more than common spirit in seasons of penury and distress; when little profit could reasonably be expected from hearers, who either languished in captivity abroad, or were plundered and impoverished by a victorious enemy at home.

The general subjects of their predictions are proofs of their integrity. The communications, which, in the awful name of God,

God, they usually made to the most exalted characters in the community, were, as I have already had occasion to remark, generally unpleasing and sometimes even tremendous. These were surely not the means best adapted to inspire gratitude or secure reward. Flattering promises and pleasing pictures of the future would, on such occasions, have been held forth by impostors. "Come and curse me this people," said the king of the Moabites to Balaam, "and I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me." These were the offices, for which the rulers of kingdoms and the leaders of armies were willing to recompense the mercenary priest, to load him with riches, and to invest him with honours. But the Prophets of Israel, in general, like the reluctant Balaam on this occasion, were unwelcome messengers to their kings, and confined their predictions to subjects of calamity and disgrace.

Had their efforts been directed to the accumulation of wealth, they would either, like the Heathen priests, have enjoined their votaries to approach them with rich and

and splendid offerings, or, like the authors and supporters of Papal corruptions, have represented the protection and favour of Heaven as abundantly indulged to those, who should exert their charity in the service of God and his ministers. But except in those signal instances, where their rank entitled them to opulence and distinction, poverty and solitude, voluntary mortifications, and a contempt of worldly pomp and pleasures, appear to have almost uniformly marked these holy men of God. Far from coveting riches, or seeking the means of voluptuousness, they were generally influenced by the same meek spirit with him, who was fed by the birds of Heaven at the solitary brook of Cherith, and who ate his humble but miraculous meal with the pious widow of Sarepta.

To these observations it may be added, that in almost every age of the Jewish history, a compliance with the unconquerable propensity of the people, in cultivating the fraudulent rites of Heathen superstition, would have opened the fairest prospect of ample and immediate wealth. And had the Prophets been actuated by worldly motives,

motives, had they not felt the influence of an inspiring and over-ruling Power, they would have accommodated their religious principles to their temporal interests, would have fled from the temple, when it was deserted by the people, and would have uttered their predictions with equal indifference at the altars of Moloch, or in the sanctuary of Jehovah.

Having endeavoured to shew the absolute unreasonableness of ascribing to imposture the conduct of the Hebrew Prophets, I shall proceed to examine, whether it was not equally remote from the phrenzy of enthusiasm.

In entering upon this discussion, it may be useful to recollect, that there is a wide distinction between zeal and fanaticism. The former was boldly and unremittingly exerted by the Prophets of Israel. The divine character, which they assumed, absolutely required this exertion, and could not otherwise be supported. They declared, that they were commissioned in a solemn and most wonderful manner, during the course of an extraordinary interposition, by the

the almighty Ruler of the universe. It may reasonably be supposed, that men, who came forth in so divine a character, would display the most ardent zeal, and adhere with unshaken fidelity to their God, notwithstanding the general prevalence of idolatry, or even the universal apostasy of the people.

With this zeal the Prophets of Israel were constantly animated. But let not its holy fervour be mistaken for the wild and lawless emotions of fanaticism. The cause, in which it was exerted, was directly opposed to that, in which fanatics are usually engaged. They are accustomed to be roused and inflamed into action by unusual convulsions of the state, or by sudden changes in government and religion. But the sacred Prophets, far from favouring a spirit of turbulence, or yielding to the allurements of novelty, were chiefly animated by the desire of perpetuating the venerable manifestations of the Deity, which had been made in remote antiquity, of strengthening the attachment of the people to that God, whom their fathers had worshipped, of preserving entire the religious establish-

ment, which had descended to them from their ancestors, and of securing the continuance of a theology, which, having prevailed through a long succession of ages, was perpetually endangered by the fickleness natural to the multitude, and by the pernicious examples of the surrounding nations.

The conduct of the Prophets was not marked by the wild extravagancies, which are usually the offspring of fanaticism. They inflamed not their hearers to bold and ambitious enterprizes ; nor kindled the heated imaginations of a faction ; nor fired the impetuous fury of the multitude to sudden violence and outrage.

The length of time, through which they flourished, is an additional proof of just and properly directed zeal. The visionary is soon consumed in his own fire. The flame is too intense for long continuance. The phrenzy either exhausts his strength, or gives birth to extravagancies, which disgrace and ruin his cause. Thus the spirit of licentious enthusiasm, which prevailed in Germany at the period of the reformation,

tion, arose and died away within the compass of a few years. But the Prophets of Jehovah continued their predictions, with few interruptions, through many successive generations. The prophetic mantle was delivered down in a kind of hereditary descent. The light of inspiration, like the great luminary of day, shone forth from age to age, without exhausting its power, or doing injury by its heat.

The uniformity of principles among the Prophets is equally striking with the circumstance of their long continuance. Fanaticism could not thus proceed in an even and uniform tenor, and upon one uninterrupted plan. Its direction would have varied with the fluctuations of public opinion: its sentiments would have been changed in compliance with the caprice or phrenzy of its several votaries. But the Prophets, arising in long succession, never deviated, as I have already more fully described in a former Lecture, from one comprehensive system, sublime in its nature, complex in its parts, and singularly difficult to be unfolded. They laboured without cessation from century to century

to resist the idolatrous propensities of their countrymen, to recommend the pure and simple worship of Jehovah, to open the scenes of futurity with a clearness gradually increasing, and to develope one connected and harmonious scheme of revelation, descending through all time, and connected with all nations.

Even the exalted situation of some of the Prophets may justly secure them from the charge of fanaticism. The high offices, with which they were sometimes invested, ought to place them far above the suspicion of a visionary spirit of wildness. Religious hypocrisy has often been artfully adopted by successful innovators, and by bold and ambitious leaders. But religious fanaticism owes its birth to a weak and precipitate temper of mind, which is peculiarly unfavourable to the subtle and arduous designs of ambition. All ages have abounded with religious fanatics. But where can one be found, who, exalted like David from the sheep-fold, filled, through numerous years, the throne of a large and prosperous kingdom, and left it as an inheritance to his children; or who, emerging,

ing, like Daniel, from a state of ignominious captivity, directed through a long life, and under successive monarchs, the administration of the greatest empire of the world?

If then the Books of the Prophets did not owe their birth either to imposture or fanaticism, they could only be delivered under the influence of Divine inspiration. This is the high and holy character, to which they uniformly assert a claim. Let us therefore finally examine, whether the general complexion of their writings appears to sanction and confirm such pretensions.

An affection or strong propensity of the mind, which is cherished during a long period, and permitted to govern our sentiments and actions, cannot be indulged in secrecy, cannot be concealed from public observation. It will be unintentionally manifested on a thousand trifling occasions. It will imperceptibly intermingle itself with actions, with which it is not necessarily connected, and give a tinge even to our remotest thoughts and expressions. Thus

when the mind is depressed by misfortunes, and overcast with gloom and despondence; or, when enlivened by hope, it indulges the fallies of joy and romantic expectation; in either case, it imparts the character of the particular feeling to the general tenor of our sentiments, and gives a distinguishing colour to our intercourse with society. Our professional employments, in proportion to the zeal with which they are prosecuted, determine in a considerable degree the distinguishing character and general complexion of the mind. Into historical and poetical compositions the sentiments of the writer both political and religious imperceptibly insinuate themselves, and bestow a peculiar cast on the body of the work. Though the real design of the poet may be pleasingly veiled under a fable or an allegory, yet it breaks forth on so many occasions in the course of the narrative, that it cannot escape the notice even of the most careless and superficial observer.

From these observations, it appears almost impossible, but that the principal object intended in any long series of writings, or zealous order of men, must of necessity be

be clearly exposed to the notice of the accurate and unprejudiced enquirer. In directing our attention to the Hebrew Prophets, for the purpose of arriving at a knowledge of their real aim, we discover, that to support the honour of the true God, and the authority of his revealed Religion, was the sole design, which they either openly avowed, or seemed in any way to favour. While we are totally unable to reconcile their conduct with the views either of impostors or enthusiasts, this principle may easily be shewn to have been constantly and unremittingly pursued through every period of their long and extraordinary history. It was always active, always kept in view. Like the spirit of life, which moves even the minutest particles of our frame, it pervaded and animated the whole scheme of their Revelation. The noblest feelings of the soul were awakened by its influence. It displayed itself sometimes in the loftiest conceptions of the Deity, sometimes in the severe invective of honest indignation, sometimes with a manly force of argument, and sometimes with the tender persuasions of pity, of gratitude, and of love. The hypocrite will occasionally betray himself

self through inadvertence; the most cautious will sometimes leave himself unguarded: he, who possesses the object desired, amidst the triumph of the acquisition, may heedlessly or from ostentation discover the artifice, which he has previously employed: he, who reposes in fancied security, may no longer be anxious to conceal the means, which facilitated his success. But never did the Prophets of Israel betray any private or temporal aim, or deviate, even in a single instance, from the pure and sublime object, which they avowedly laboured to attain. In wealth and in poverty, in triumph and in defeat, when seated like David upon a throne, or like Amos tending the herds, they invariably declared themselves to be employed as the ministers of Jehovah in revealing his will to mankind.

SERMON

S E R M O N VIII.

EZEKIEL ii. 4, 5.

I DO SEND THEE ~~U~~ TO THEM; AND THOU
SHALT SAY UNTO THEM, THUS SAITH
THE LORD GOD.

AND THEY, WHETHER THEY WILL HEAR,
OR WHETHER THEY WILL FORBEAR, (FOR
THEY ARE A REBELLIOUS HOUSE,) YET
SHALL KNOW, THAT THERE HATH BEEN
A PROPHET AMONG THEM.

THE early ages of nations have been uniformly distinguished by the popular belief of a supernatural gift of Prophecy. A supposed acquaintance with futurity gratifies the curiosity of man, and is peculiarly calculated to delight and overpower his imagination. He is naturally anxious with respect to the probable events of future times,

times, the consideration of which awakens some of his strongest passions. The more deeply he expects to be interested in them, the more powerfully he feels the alternate ascendancy of hope and of fear, which such a prescience is calculated to excite. Astonished at effects, of which, from the feebleness of his intellectual powers, he is unable to assign the cause, and alarmed at appearances, the consequences of which lie out of the reach of his penetration, he recurs for assistance to the revelations of superior beings, and receives with reverence whatever he supposes them to disclose. Not yet enlightened by science and civilization, he is unable to examine and detect the gross fallacies of the pretended Prophet, in whom he credulously reposes confidence: while the gloomy superstition, which at such an early stage of society universally prevails, enforces upon him a blind and unsuspecting assent. From the influence of these causes, the belief of a spirit of Prophecy has always existed in the infant state of society, whether we examine the records of the savage and gloomy hordes of the North, or the milder and more simple condition of primitive manners

ners in the East; or attend to the instinctive suggestions of nature as manifested in the inhabitants of the western hemisphere.

Even civilization, when arrived at its most perfect state, and intellectual improvement, when advanced to its utmost height, are unable completely to dispel the illusion. They may temper its grossness and veil its absurdities: they may partially weaken its influence and deprive it of some of its most illustrious votaries; but, unless assisted by the authority of the Christian Religion, they can neither eradicate it from the minds of the ignorant and superstitious multitude, nor wrest it from the hands of the politician, who employs it as a powerful engine of government, and an useful instrument of ambition.

Let not the Believer, however, be disengaged, nor the Infidel presumptuously hope to triumph, because the numerous superstitions of the world, equally with our holy Religion, lay claim to a spirit of Prophecy. The pretensions of Christianity to this decisive proof of a supernatural interposition are supported by evidence totally unat-

unattainable by impostors. In every point of view, in which we contemplate the Prophets of truth, the divine nature of their mission most clearly and forcibly appears. Even from the detail of minute circumstances, connected with their holy office, additional arguments may be derived, by which our confidence in revelation may be invigorated and confirmed.

On a subject so awful and momentous as that of a miraculous communication between the great Creator and his humble creatures, by the agency of inspired ministers, it may without presumption be expected, that all the circumstances relative to the OPENING and FINAL CLOSE of so wonderful an intercourse, together with the MEANS employed and the OBJECT intended, should be in no respect unworthy of the high and holy character implicated in such consideration. It is my intention, therefore, on the present occasion, to investigate the particular parts of the subject, to which I have just alluded, for the purpose of discovering farther evidence in favour of the inspiration of the Prophets.

A

A testimony singularly striking, in proof of the divine origin of sacred Prophecy, appears at the opening of the wonderful scheme. In tracing back the history of Revelation, it is reasonable to expect, that when we have arrived at the moment of its commencement, it will appear in its native purity, unfulfilled by mortal corruptions. As the river flows with increasing clearness, when we ascend towards the fountain: so religion; it may justly be supposed, will bear the most manifest marks of divinity, when we have reached the auspicious period, in which she first descended from Heaven.

If we explore the early state of Pagan Oracles, we shall find, that they shrink from the application of this just and reasonable test. Though the Christian believes, that they originated in a corruption of the traditions respecting the real revelations of the Almighty, yet so humiliating and base were the circumstances attending their first institution, according to the accounts of the idolatrous nations, in which they were either invented or preserved, that the simple recital of them will scarcely

scarcely become the seriousness and solemnity of the place, in which we are assembled. They were supposed to be inspired by deceased mortals. No cause, worthy of a divine interposition, and peculiarly operating at that particular moment, is assigned for their commencement. Even the most celebrated Oracles of antiquity arose upon occasions the most unimportant and puerile, which the imagination can conceive. They were the disgrace of rational man. And they exhibit a striking instance of the low state of degradation, into which the Almighty permits his creatures to sink, when they have departed from the knowledge of his revealed will, and prostituted their reason in the service of superstition.

How awful and sublime was the scene, with which the Christian Revelation opened! It proceeded from the one God, pure, spiritual, and invisible, the maker and the preserver of worlds, the high and mighty One, who is from everlasting. It began in the infancy of nature, with the first inhabitants of the earth, from whom have been derived all the nations of the globe. It was

was occasioned by circumstances the most interesting and awful, which a reasonable being can contemplate; the fall of a new race of creatures by sin, and the benevolent intention of the Creator to restore them to life and immortality.

From the origin of Prophecy, let us direct our attention to its final close. When the divine inspiration of the real Prophets had ceased, the Pagan Oracles no longer uttered their predictions. Yet no cause, independent of Christianity, and arising from their own nature solely, can be assigned either for their cessation or their continued silence. No important end had been attained, by the accomplishment of which their future operation was rendered unnecessary. The same circumstances, which had so long occasioned their delusive reign, seemed to require their uninterrupted continuance through all succeeding ages. The impossibility of assigning a ready and adequate reason for the entire departure of the prophetic spirit, may be justly inferred from the futile and fanciful conjectures, by which the wondering Heathen attempted to explain its cessation. The Poet and the

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Priest

Priest excited a popular belief that the inspiring Deity had yielded to mortality, and was no longer numbered among the Gods. While the grave and inquisitive philosopher^a, with a credulity scarcely less culpable, declared, that the exhalations and vapours, which had been the instruments of inspiring the prophetic phrenzy^b, had at length, from continued use, exhausted their virtues ; and that, hence, the disappointed votary slept in vain upon the bank, which was consecrated to the Deity, or drank of the stream, by which he hoped to be inspired.

The real cause of this extraordinary event, the Pagan was either unable to discern, or unwilling to acknowledge. As the Heathen Oracles originated in the perversion of true religion, so their final departure was occasioned by its wide and glorious diffusion. When Christianity began to prevail, the evil spirits, who had

^a Plut. lib. de defect. Orac. Julian. apud Cyrrillum. l. vi.

^b Even Aristotle and Pliny the Elder supposed, that certain exhalations from the earth occasioned the phrenzy, in which the Oracles, called Natural, were delivered. Aristot. lib. de Mundo c. iv. p. 11. Plinius. l. ii. Nat. Hist. c. xcii.

pro-

probably on some occasions assisted, though in a limited manner, the artifices of human imposture, were no longer permitted to exercise their malignant power. Their authority gradually declined; and the frauds to which they had given countenance at length were fully terminated.

When the pretended spirit of Prophecy had departed, no vestige of the Oracles remained, which regarded succeeding times. The predictions had no reference to futurity, and distant generations were totally uninterested in their effusions. When the temples were closed, and the priests had deserted their caves, their influence among mankind finally ceased; and they have been of no more consequence to posterity, than the memory of the multitudes, whom they had deceived, and the ravages, which they had impiously sanctioned. Such has uniformly been the fate of deception. The volumes of the Sibyl, which, during the ages of the Roman republic, were so often apparently consulted for the purpose of deluding the ignorant populace; when the temporary purposes, which they favoured, had been obtained, were disregarded and soon con-

signed to oblivion. In the same manner, the Sibylline verses, invented during the early progress of Christianity, were unable to endure the scrutiny of liberal and unprejudiced enquirers, and have generally been condemned as a contrivance of imposture, by all succeeding ages.

The fate of the Heathen Oracles in later times has been not unworthy of their cause. Among the great mass of mankind they have sunk into entire oblivion. By philosophers they have been regarded as deceptions, and have been treated sometimes with contempt, and sometimes with deserved neglect. Their mysterious rites, explored by the classical scholar, and inquisitive antiquary, have been exhibited as objects of pleasing though barren curiosity; and sometimes they have been brought forward by the theologian as a secondary argument in favour of real inspiration, the authority of which is strengthened by a judicious and candid comparison with the most celebrated and successful systems of prophetic imposture.

The gift of Prophecy, which, through a long

long revolution of ages, had gradually prepared the way for Christianity, was withdrawn soon after its promulgation, because the grand object was accomplished, for which it had been originally imparted. The roll of sacred Prophecy had been disclosed for the purpose of becoming an instrument of the divine government among a chosen people, and of affording a miraculous testimony to the character and doctrines of the divine Founder of our holy Religion. When the Jewish polity was dissolved, and when the Saviour of mankind had concluded his benevolent work, and the Gospel was triumphant over the world, the spirit of inspiration for ever disappeared. Far from being opposed in its farther progress, like the Pagan Oracles, by the over-ruling influence of a superior Deity, or an hostile religion, it closed its career at a moment peculiarly favourable to its farther exertions. That particular Revelation, to the truth of which it had borne the most decisive and unquestionable evidence, was beginning to possess an unbounded influence among mankind, and was consequently enabled to afford an additional sanction to its divine pretensions.

While the condition of the Jewish people, to whom the communications of the divine spirit had been almost exclusively imparted, seemed at that important æra more especially to require the comfort and assurances of divine Prophecy. They were about to be exposed to the most tremendous calamities, to civil dissentions, and a foreign invasion, to the miseries of a siege, the destruction of their city, the dissolution of their civil polity, and a long dispersion of their tribes. It is amidst these awful scenes of national distress, that pretenders to divine inspiration most commonly arise. And let it not be forgotten, that in seasons of similar calamity and despondence in past ages, the communications of the Prophets had been most frequently and most earnestly imparted to the people of Israel. Had sacred Prophecy, therefore, been a mere human artifice, the strongest reasons seemed not only to favour, but imperiously to demand, its longer continuance. It was, however, withdrawn, because the sublime scheme was completed, for the due unfolding of which it had originally been displayed. The effect ceased, when the cause no longer operated.

But

But though numerous ages have elapsed since the Prophets terminated their labours, yet their writings engage the curiosity, and are connected with the dearest interests and most exalted hopes of the present inhabitants of the earth. Time, the great foe of imposture, has confirmed many of their more remote predictions, and thus has augmented the general force of the evidence, which they afford. The generation now living, though in circumstances in some respects different, is no less interested in them, than was the favoured people, to whom they were originally sent. The general characteristics, and the distinguishing peculiarities of some of the most remarkable nations, at present existing in the world, were described by the ancient Prophets with almost the same accuracy, with which they may now be traced by the eye of the beholder.

The Christian, indeed, preserves with the most vigilant attention those precious and holy remains, upon the credit of which, in addition to other incontestible evidences, he has enlisted under the banners of a spiritual Redeemer, and cherished the sure

and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life.

Hence the veneration, with which these Oracles have been received among mankind, has been worthy of their importance and their truth. When the dispensation was terminated, during the progress of which they had been gradually delivered, they were carried forth from the contracted limits of Judea, and proposed to the world at large in an age, peculiarity distinguished by liberality of sentiment, justness of criticism, and philosophical severity of investigation. Yet among the numerous nations of the earth, united for the first time by one connecting government, in the common exercise of reason and of taste, they forced their way to general notice, and were at length received with universal assent by the whole civilized part of mankind.

At a later æra, upon the revival of learning, after lying for centuries, together with genuine Christianity, in the grave of ignorance and darkness, they came forth in their original purity, and excited the immediate attention of the theological scholar.

lar. During the three last centuries, which have been marked by peculiar accuracy and freedom of research, they have been submitted to the examination of numerous enquirers, unconnected with the sacred ministry, and uninterested in the secular emoluments of religion ; whose names no scholar can pronounce without enthusiasm, and no Christian can hear without veneration. They have not only endured the severe scrutiny of these eminent and impartial critics ; but even acquired additional importance and authority from their unqualified approbation and unshaken belief.

So just, indeed, and forcible are the claims of the sacred Prophecies to universal belief, that even the Jewish people, to whom they were originally addressed, still continue to contemplate them with undiminished veneration. Though they have existed through many centuries, suffering the most tremendous inflictions of Almighty vengeance in consequence of their stubborn rejection of the Christian Religion, the divine nature of which has been maintained in opposition to their incredulity partly upon the authority of these very Prophecies ; yet they

they firmly persevere in regarding them as the productions of the omniscient God, and expect their full accomplishment in future according to their own erroneous interpretations.

The advantages, which result from an intimate knowledge of the circumstances connected with the opening and final close of the great scheme of Prophecy, will be considerably heightened by the farther prosecution of our enquiries. The means, which the Prophets employed, and the end, which they uniformly pursued, when clearly and fully understood, become peculiarly instrumental in appreciating their veracity.

The more exalted is the office assumed, the more striking are the characteristics expected. Those, who present themselves to the notice of mankind, as ministers employed for the solemn purpose of maintaining an immediate and extraordinary intercourse between the Creator and the creature, undoubtedly assume the loftiest character, which can claim the attention, or demand the reverence of an human being. If, therefore, the means adopted, by those

who

who pretend to such a character, be artful, base, and mysterious, and the end proposed be local, temporary, and merely human, it is not unreasonable, that doubts should be entertained of the reality of their Divine mission. While on the other hand, our conviction of their actual inspiration will be confirmed, if it shall appear, that the opposite qualities unquestionably predominate; and that the characteristics displayed are altogether worthy of the exalted Being, whose Revelation is presumed to be unfolded.

These observations may be applied with singular effect, in the progress of our farther enquiries into sacred Prophecy. While the Hebrew Prophets exhibit the dignified characteristics of a real Revelation; the Heathen Oracles abundantly prove, that those characteristics will not be found among the false pretenders to inspiration in the depraved systems of superstition and imposture.

When we contemplate the means invented by the priests of ancient Polytheism for the pretended purpose of obtaining a know-

knowledge of the will of the gods, our astonishment is strongly excited by the diversity of unworthy modes adopted. They were generally unmeaning; and sometimes even base in the extreme. They lower the dignity of our nature; and might be expected rather in an Indian tribe, a Tartarian horde, or a savage clan of Africa, than in the bosom of refined and civilized society. And they manifestly prove, that mankind, even when adorned with the highest intellectual improvement, become debased and degraded in their nature, if superstition be permitted to obtain its direful ascendancy over the mind.

The Oracles of Greece and Rome uttered their predictions, not in sudden and unexpected effusions, when inspiration irresistibly approached, and utterance was impelled by the divine and overpowering spirit: but only at regular hours in the accustomed seasons of divination. At the delivery of the pretended revelations, in the higher kinds of divination, the most palpable de-

* See Potter's Antiquities, v. i. in which may be found an accurate enumeration of the principal kinds of divination used among the Greeks.

ceptions

ceptions^d were generally practised, to give solemnity to the fictitious rites, and delude the ignorant votaries. The most mountainous countries were usually selected by the priests for the imaginary residence of the inspiring Deity^e. They erected their temples and consecrated their altars in woods and groves, amidst the awful gloom of solitude. They sent forth their voices from the caves of the mountains, shaded by branches, and clouded with incense. The Sibylline books, the principal source of prophetic information among the Romans, were consulted only by the most illustrious magistrates of the republic, and in seasons of danger and turbulence alone, in which it was necessary to overawe the minds of the people, by the pretended admonitions of Heaven, and an authority, from which there could be no appeal. The Grecian Oracles imitated the power of miracles, by means of a machinery, the detection of which exceeded the ability of an illiterate

^d Eusebius *Præpar. Evang.* l. iv. c. 2. Theodoret. *Hist. Ecclef.* l. ii. c. 22.

^e See Virgil. *Æneid* l. vi. v. 42. See the account of the Oracle at Delphi in Strabo l. ix. *Isaiah* xlvi. 19.

and

and credulous multitude. They agitated and deformed their countenances by ecstasies and trances artificially produced; and profanely represented the hideous appearances, which were the consequences of such violent efforts, as the overpowering emotions of the Deity, by whom they professed to be inspired. The attendant mysteries awed the trembling worshipper into a religious silence, and solemn apprehension, which, while they heightened the sanctity of the prophetic ceremony, repressed suspicion, and intimidated the most daring curiosity. But though, at the moment of inspiration, the body was apparently convulsed, and the most frantic gestures were displayed, yet the language uttered by no means exhibited a correspondent energy. Far from being dignified by the sublime ideas, which are connected with the contemplation of sacred subjects; or marked by that majestic simplicity, which accompanies the display of the divine will; or elevated by that holy and enthusiastic fervour, which may be expected to be kindled by the immediate intercourse of the creature with the Creator; it was peculiarly unimpassioned and mean, as well

as

as incorrect^f. The poet and the critic, the mercenary ministers of superstition, were frequently concealed within the mysterious recesses of the temple and the cave^g, for the purpose of assisting the imperfections of the priestess. The expressions were not only obscure, but often equivocal; and easily capable of two interpretations^h, directly opposite the one to the other. By these ambiguities the credulous votary was misled, and the most disastrous consequences produced. Hence the wealthy Lydian monarch boldly crossed the stream; and the loss of the kingdom was the effect of his ungrounded confidence.

From these arts of base and palpable imposture let us direct our attention to scenes altogether worthy of a most serious consideration.

The first Revelations of Jehovah to mankind, as recorded in the sacred Writings, are the most awful and sublime, which it is in the power of the imagination to conceive,

^f Plutarch, lib. de Pythiae Orac.

^g Id.

^h Cicero de Divinatione l. ii. sect. 56.

and

and can only be contemplated with solemnity and serious devotion. The Deity himself is represented as deigning personally to appear, and open the wonderful scheme of Prophecy by the most benevolent promise, which could be made to fallen man. At a later period the high and mighty One sometimes spake from out of Heaven ; sometimes was he discovered in the midst of the burning bush ; sometimes did he reveal his divine glories, ineffably effulgent, amidst the solemn solitude of nature ; and sometimes did he appear with clouded majesty in his temple.

During the infancy of the world, the holy messengers of the Almighty frequently visited the venerable Patriarchs : and while, in the discharge of their high mission, they disclosed the scenes of futurity, they unveiled to mortal eyes the glory of celestial intelligences.

When angels had ceased to descend among a corrupted race of men, the human Prophet was inspired by the Holy Spirit, a Person of the ever blessed Trinity, the lord and giver of life, from whom was derived

derived the astonishing power of suspending the laws of the universe.

The Prophecy delivered was frequently accompanied by some immediate act of Omnipotence. The prediction was uttered, and the miracle performed in the public streets in open day, and before a numerous assembly of witnesses. No mystery, nor mechanical effort was attempted. The Prophecy was distinctly delivered, and the miracle simply effected, without effort, and without ostentation. Though, in conformity with one of the great ends purposed by the Almighty in his wonderful scheme of Revelation, the expressions adopted were sometimes designedly obscure till the completion of the predicted events; and though they were occasionally capable of receiving, and were actually intended to bear, a double meaning, yet they were not ambiguous; they could not even in a single instance be justly accommodated to contrary interpretations: while in the greater number of instances the predictions were singularly clear, were intelligible before the season of accomplishment, and, the event having come to pass, were calculated to strike the

mind with peculiar force, by the perfect coincidence of the Prophecy with the occurrence.

The exact words, in which the sacred Oracles were couched, were received by the most exalted characters in the community from the inspired persons by whom they were delivered, and were preserved with the most religious fidelity. They were admitted, in the earlier ages of the Jewish theocracy, into the ark¹, and, after the reign of Solomon, into the temple of Jerusalem. Before the final close of inspiration under the Mosaic œconomy, they were daily recited in the temple at Jerusalem as a part of the service of God. And, in order that they might be preserved from the possibility of corruption, the sentences, the words, and even the letters were numbered.

With respect to the peculiar excellence of the prophetic writings, it is not sufficient to observe, that the Prophets dignified divine poetry with lofty imagery, which

¹ Deuteronomy xxxi. 26.

is sometimes displayed in the romantic boldness of an eastern mind. It has also been maintained, that even the most celebrated poets of antiquity were rivalled, and in some instances excelled, by the inspired writers. Virgil, the successful imitator of the great Grecian Bard, the grace and pride of the most prosperous age of Roman grandeur, has been represented as cold and weak, even upon a similar subject^k, in comparison with the expressive and daring imagery of Isaiah: and no similar production, it has been urged, in all classical antiquity, can vie^l with the sublime and animated ode, wherein the same Prophet predicted the fall of Babylon. It has also been frequently and strenuously asserted^m, that the productions of Horace and Anacreon, of Pindar, Callimachus, and the Greek tragedians, have been excelled by David and the inspired

^k See Virg. Ecl. 4.

^l See Bishop Lowth on Isaiah xiii. and Michaelis.

^m Lowth, Praelect. 29. compares the Hymns of the Hebrews, in celebrating the praises of the Deity, with those of Homer and Callimachus. The same writer, in his letter to Warburton, compares the Prophecies of Balaam with the Odes of Homer.

composers of the Hebrew Odes and Hymns in justness of sentiment, boldness of transition, fervour of poetic enthusiasm, happiness of dramatic effect, and the variety of exquisite sensations, which affect the heart and overpower the mind:—that in the strain of tender and pathetic lamentation, the elegiac productions of Ovid and of Tibullus, will be found inferior to those of Jeremiah;—that even the simple wildness, the vehemence, and the tremendous dignity of *Æschylus*^{*}, has not produced passages superior to some of the grand imagery of Ezekiel;—and that the expressions of the Roman satirist, who, amidst the enormous corruptions of the capital, arraigned the vices of his countrymen in a strain of the most sarcastic severity, though they were excited by an honest indignation, and invigorated by an uncommon genius, are less striking and energetic than the invectives of the Prophets of God against the disobedience and idolatry of their ungrateful countrymen.

^{*} See Lowth. Grotius compares Ezékiel with Homer. See the Bishop of Lincoln's Christian Theology, v. i. p. 117. See also Newcome's Preface to his Ezekiel.

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Independently of the comparison which has thus been established between individual compositions in classical and Hebrew antiquity, the general superiority of the inspired Prophets, over the most celebrated poets of Greece and Rome, has been repeatedly and strenuously maintained^o. Whether the opinion be altogether just, it shall not be my business to enquire. Even if the superiority be not allowed to the inspired writers, it is sufficient for my argument, that the comparison has been instituted by men of the most extensive erudition, and of exalted genius; and that, in their estimation, the writings of the Jewish Prophets have been thought worthy even of being brought into competition with those productions of taste and genius, which have been regarded through all ages as the most successful efforts of the human mind. Let the responses of Heathen divination be examined: let them be compared with the Greek and Roman poets.

^o Addifon. Spectator, N^o. 453. Sir W. Jones's works, v. i. See Sir J. Shore's Discourse as President of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, May 22d. 1794. See also the opinion of a celebrated French writer quoted by Newcome in his Preface to Ezekiel.

The idea cannot be endured even for a moment ; the inferiority is too palpable : the boldest Sceptic, however he may have laboured in general and indiscriminate assertions to compare the Pagan Oracles with sacred Prophecy, has not ventured to insinuate an equality in this important point.

Such were the dignified means employed by the Almighty in the course of his divine Revelation through the agency of his holy Prophets.

The wonderful and momentous end, which was proposed by Christian Prophecy, is another corroborating testimony in favour of its divine origin. The degree of credit due to any long series of predictions, may in some measure be ascertained by the importance of the object, which they are intended to attain. The Deity, it may be presumed, will not manifest himself to his creatures by such supernatural means, except for purposes of transcendent and universal importance. A divine manifestation, which is graciously given to favour the cause of virtue, or to promote the welfare of mankind, must, even in the speculations of

of the philosopher, alone appear worthy of that exalted Being, by whom the world was made, and the race of man created. The farther a religion recedes in its ultimate object from this scheme of comprehensive benevolence, the stronger doubts may be reasonably entertained of its excellence and of its truth. Upon this momentous point, Christianity lays claim to a decisive superiority. The superstitions of the world exhibit indubitable signs of a mortal origin. The religion of Christ is stamped with the seal of divinity. The former originated in fiction, and were degraded to the uses of imposture. Some human purpose, some personal pursuit, some national aim, formed the principal subject of the pretended inspiration. The Prophecy was confined to a single people, or a favourite hero, to an insurrection, or a battle, to a system of national aggrandizement, the pride and folly of the day, and to schemes of pleasure and prosperity, which were bounded by the grave. It was given to flatter caprice or vanity, to indulge the lawless sallies of ambition, and sometimes even to sanction the unworthy efforts of hypocrisy and injustice.

Such are the features which may naturally be expected to distinguish all pretended prophecies: and such was the general character of the Greek and Roman art of divination. Among the higher orders of society, who by their opulence were enabled to reward the venal effusions of the priests, the Oracles were resorted to, and the prophetic answers were given in the most unimportant occurrences of private life^P, altogether unworthy of an interposition of the Deity. In healing a disease, in leading forth a colony, in laying the foundations of a city, and in promulgating a new system of legislation, the auspicious declarations of the mercenary prophet, were carefully procured. When an ambitious demagogue was preparing the chains of servitude for his free born fellow citizens, when a victorious enemy was hovering round a metropolis, when the populace was either inflamed to madness, or depressed into despondence; then was the prophetic influence applied, and the book of fate opened. The favourable report of the

^P Eusebius *Præpar. Evang.* I. ii. c. 29.

augurs

augurs was considered by the Romans as a security equally necessary to the success of an expedition as the valour of the legions, or the ability of the commander: and the armies of the republic marched forth to universal empire, animated by the flattering predictions of the priests. Even the crafty politics of Philip ⁹, and the enthusiastic spirit of Alexander, called in the aid of inspiration, and smoothed their way to victory and empire, by the auspicious communications of the gods of their country ¹⁰.

If Jewish Prophecy had been intended solely to promote the temporal prosperity of the Israelites, to inspire them with confidence against the armies of the Philistines, or to establish the throne of Jerusalem in the family of David, it might have

⁹ The *φιλανθρωπία* of the Pythian priestess, of which Demosthenes complained, is well known. Perialla, a Pythian priestess, was deprived of her office on account of her being corrupted by one of the Cleomenes's, king of Sparta.

¹⁰ For proofs of the frequency of divination among the ancients upon such occasions as those enumerated in this paragraph, see Cicero *de Divinatione*, *sect. 1, 2.*

been

been thought to sink to the common level of superstitious predictions, and would perhaps have been ranked with the numerous omens and portents, which are recorded by Heathen historians. It is true that these national ends were frequently attained by a subordinate and secondary use. The Jewish government being under the immediate direction of Jehovah; he awfully manifested his paternal love and protection in its divine dispensation through the medium of Prophecy.

But though temporal success was sometimes the subject of the sacred predictions, yet it must not be considered as their sole, or even principal object. The holy men of God, who spake as the spirit gave them utterance, went not forth for the purpose of swelling the pride of the Israelites, or nerving their arm for victory. No: they were employed to convince a people of their wickedness, and call them to repentance; to deliver the pure precepts of sound morality; and to preserve from absolute extinction, amidst a corrupt and impious world, the knowledge of the true God. They

They strenuously endeavoured to withhold one nation, at least, from burning incense upon the altars of Baal, and from sacrificing infant innocence to the gloomy power of Moloch; to alarm them into piety by a visible display of miracles, and to overpower them with an irresistible conviction of the superintendence of the one supreme Being, by Prophecies publicly delivered, and often speedily fulfilled.

This was doubtless an aim peculiarly dignified, and sufficient to exalt the Hebrew Prophets beyond all comparison above the priests of Heathen superstitions. But they directed their labours to a still more exalted end. Under the influence of that benevolent Being, who rejoices in the happiness of all his creatures, they carried on the divine scheme of universal redemption. When man had debased his nature by sin, and was become subject to death, inspired by the Almighty, they opened the great scheme of Revelation, which proposes, as its ultimate object, the everlasting salvation of the whole human race. Independent
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of kingdoms and of empires, they came forth as heralds to prepare the way for the Son of the Most High. In this lofty character, they proclaimed the future appearance of that exalted Personage, who, neglecting human praise, and averse from temporal dominion, should, by voluntary sufferings and an ignominious death, reunite the human race to God, and restore them to the hope of a joyful immortality ; should promulgate a pure and most benevolent system of moral and religious duty ; denounce eternal punishment against hardened sinners, and ensure to the righteous a life of everlasting happiness. At his coming, it was decreed by divine Wisdom, that the bloody altars of Moloch should be overthrown, and the star of Remphan be clouded in perpetual darkness. Before the brightness of his presence, all the objects of Heathen idolatry, all the imaginary deities of Greece and Rome, were gradually to disappear. Till at length his Religion, pure and spiritual, founded on perfect morality and rational piety, promoting peace on earth, and conducting man to Heaven, should triumph over worldly superstitions,

tions, and unite all the inhabitants of the globe in one bond of sacred brotherhood and love, obedient to their common Redeemer, and protected by the universal God.

S E R M O N IX.

DANIEL x. 14.

NOW I AM COME TO MAKE THEE UNDER-
STAND WHAT SHALL BEFAL THY PEO-
PLE IN THE LATTER DAYS.

IN referring to the present times, I have already alluded to one important circumstance, which forcibly obtrudes itself upon the observation of the serious enquirer. Many of the most remarkable predictions in the sacred Writings are at this hour receiving their accomplishment. We are enabled to bear witness to their completion from a knowledge of facts acquired by personal experience.

As this circumstance seems peculiarly calculated to augment the force of the general

neral testimony, I shall make it the principal subject of the present concluding Discourse.

The evidence from miracles, in support of our holy Religion, produced a more powerful and immediate conviction in the mind, during the first propagation of Christianity, than it is capable of effecting in these later ages of the world. They were then presented to the senses; but the truth of them must now depend upon the force of human testimony. The visible performance of a miracle is a more powerful instrument of conversion, than the most authentic narratives of such supernatural effects. The metaphysical subtleties, which are now vainly used for the purpose of proving the absolute incompetence of all human testimony for the confirmation of a miracle, would have been nugatory and absurd, if they had been addressed to those, before whom the wonderful work had been recently displayed. In the age of supernatural interpositions, therefore, the Sceptic indulged his doubts upon the peculiar nature of that Power, which was able to suspend the regular order of physical causes and effects.

fects. Through subsequent ages it has been his chief endeavour to deny the reality of such a suspension: what he does not behold, he is unwilling to believe. That, which is reported to have occurred only in a remote antiquity, and among a particular people, he presumptuously ventures to determine, has not occurred at all.

Of a miracle, which has been performed, no traces in general remain at any distant period. Like the lightning, it appears for the moment, and then is withdrawn for ever from the view. When the divided waters of the sea had returned to their ancient course, every vestige of the wonder was removed. When the man, restored to life, was again brought down to the grave, no visible effects of his resurrection remained to assist the belief of posterity. Among the innumerable acts of a supernatural interposition, with which, in the early ages of mankind, the progress of divine Revelation was accompanied, in a few solitary instances, on the mountains of Sinai and near Jerusalem, some durable marks were impressed upon natural objects, which, though

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justly entitled * to the assent of the serious and unprejudiced enquirer, are yet insufficient, perhaps, to remove the doubts and command the belief of the Sceptic: and they are alluded to, on the present occasion, not as testimonies in favour of miracles, but as proofs of the general defect of such a species of evidence in their support.

The nature of a prophecy, in the peculiar circumstance now under consideration, is directly opposite to that of a miracle. Time, which diminishes the almost irresistible efficacy of the one, gives additional strength and authority to the other. A prediction, at the moment in which it is delivered, receives credit in proportion to the faith of the believer. But the event, in which a prediction is completed, is calculated to impel conviction in all those, who can ascertain its reality by personal observation, and can compare it with the previous description of the Prophet.

* See Dr. Shaw's Travels, p. 352. and Pocock's Travels, p. 148. See also Bishop Clayton's Vindication of the Old Testament.

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As we retrace the history of the divine government among the Jews, the higher we ascend, the number of predictions fulfilled becomes proportionally diminished. Prophecy has been justly denominated a growing evidence. Each succeeding generation accomplishes particular predictions; and thus, without diminishing the force of those which preceded them, adds numbers and weight to the general evidence.

To these observations it may be added, that a course of ages, so long as to constitute a very considerable portion of all past time, has intervened between the delivery and the fulfilment of those predictions, which respect the present condition of mankind. Revolutions in society the most strange and unexpected have since taken place; and consequently the existing state of the kingdoms, in which the respective completions occur, must be instantly allowed to be totally unconnected with that, which was exhibited to the view of the Prophets. The predictions, therefore, which are now receiving their accomplishment, are clearly exempt from all suspicion of having been

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placed within the reach of human sagacity and foresight.

Furthermore, in the ancient world, an opinion was generally prevalent, that favoured individuals, in all nations and under every system of religious worship, were endued with a power of divination. Hence, no person, an Israelite alone excepted, who witnessed the completion of an Hebrew Prophecy, could reasonably be expected on that account to allow an higher degree of credibility to the Jewish religion, than to his own national superstition, the ministers of which, he deemed equally capable of revealing the secrets of futurity. In the present age such an opinion is altogether renounced. While the unfounded pretensions of all the systems of worldly superstition to the art of divination, have been universally withdrawn ; Christianity still continues to advance and vindicate this decisive proof of a divine descent : and he, who from his own speculation upon objects immediately submitted to his senses, is obliged to admit the justness of these pretensions, does not feel the force of the testi-

testimony weakened by the contending claims of rival systems of religion to a similar spirit of prescience.

These considerations induce us to cherish the hope, that Prophecy, from the fortunate circumstance of its affording in many instances, like a visible miracle, a striking object to the senses in those events, by which its reality is confirmed, may be rendered a powerful instrument at the present day in converting the Infidel, or fixing the faith of the Sceptic.

In order to give the utmost possible effect to this peculiarly forcible testimony, the present state of all those nations, in which the predictions of the ancient Prophets are verified, should be recommended to his most earnest consideration. Let him cast his eye over the map of our globe: let him contemplate the vastness of its extent, and the variety of realms, into which it has been divided: let him bear in mind the great number of centuries, which have elapsed since the delivery of the last of the long train of Jewish and Christian predictions: and then let him direct his attention

to all those nations now existing under such circumstances as to afford visible and most decisive proofs of their exact completion.

If he hesitates to yield implicit credit to the descriptions of the traveller, and is unwilling to repose entire confidence except in objects submitted to the evidence of his own senses, let him go forth, and survey the several countries, in which the accomplishment of the respective Prophecies is at this moment taking place. Let him begin his researches in the East, which has been at once the favoured seat and the principal subject of Prophecy. As he advances on his way, let him contemplate the fate of the seven cities ^b, which were once the glory of Asia Minor, and the ornament of the early Church of Christ. In the days of the Prophet they flourished in nearly the same state of splendour and of

^b For the predictions respecting the seven Churches see Revelations i. ii. For the circumstances in their present condition illustrative of the truth of the prediction, see Smith's Sept. Asiae Eccles. Notit. Rycaut's present state of the Greek Church. Wheler and Spon's Voyages. Van Egmont and Heyman's Travels. See also Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, v. i. c. 15, 16.

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power. But they now appear in the exact condition, to which they were respectively doomed. Of the five, specifically named, of which the entire fall was predicted, the melancholy ruins will attest and illustrate the truth of the Prophet. Thyatira, in which the pious Lydia resided, and Laodicea, the head of sixteen bishoprics, are reduced to a state of entire desolation. A few miserable hamlets, the habitations of shepherds, which have been erected amidst the ruins of temples, palaces, and theatres, and in which no Christian Church is established, are now the sole remains of Pergamos, the capital of a celebrated empire, of Ephesus, one of the eyes of Asia, and of Sardis, the opulent seat of the Lydian monarchs. The two remaining cities, the preservation of which was promised, still retain some portion of their former magnificence. Smyrna in particular, which was to have the crown of life, flourishes in a very considerable state of prosperity: while in Philadelphia, which has been kept from the hour of temptation, the holy rites of Christianity are observed under the government of Mussulmen, and near the mosques of Mahomet.

ing one of the clearest, fullest, and most extraordinary predictions, which divine Wisdom has condescended to deliver. Let him examine the situation of the Jews. We have already seen, that it is in its nature miraculous; and that the numerous and striking peculiarities, by which it is distinguished, were clearly and forcibly foretold. The confirmation of those Prophecies in the Pentateuch, in Jeremiah, and in the Gospels, which relate to the present condition of that unhappy people, may be ascertained by the actual observations of the most common beholder in every kingdom of the globe. In Christian, in Mahometan, and in Pagan countries, the descendants of Abraham universally abound: and they afford almost as visible and decisive a testimony of the truth of Prophecy, as the creation and the government of the world afford of the wisdom and power of God.

Let the Sceptic contemplate with seriousness and impartiality all these remarkable circumstances in the present condition of mankind, with which the descriptions of the ancient Prophets thus accurately coincide.

In returning through the Holy Land, let him recollect the uncommon fruitfulness, with which it once was blessed; and then contemplate its present extraordinary barrenness. Within the region, where the Prophets uttered their predictions, let him recur to their precise expressions^e; and he will be convinced by the evidence of his own senses, that even the qualities of nature have been subjected to alteration, in confirmation of the truth of Prophecy^f.

In some part of the Holy Land, the descendants of Rechab may be presented to his observation. Two thousand four hundred years have elapsed since it was promised to their pious ancestor by Jeremiah^g, that there should not be wanting a man of his family to stand before the Lord for ever. Amidst the most remarkable fluctuations of human society, and the extinc-

^e Leviticus xxvi. 33. Isaiah i. 7, 8, 9. Jeremiah xii. 10, 11.

^f The barrenness is so striking, that Infidels have frequently asserted the absolute impossibility of maintaining within the limits of the Holy Land the numerous inhabitants, which the Old Testament supposes to have been resident.

^g Jeremiah xxxv. 18, 19.

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pear in any other composition of antiquity. The Greeks and Romans boasted of numerous Oracles, which pretended to develope the future fortunes of individuals and of states: many of their vaunted predictions have descended to these later times: but do they contain a prophetic picture of any of the extraordinary characteristics, which distinguish the present generation? Have we not seen, that not one of their numerous priests even attempted to dispel the gloom, by which remote events are necessarily concealed from mortal knowledge? The most celebrated historians recorded innumerable prophecies, in which the passions of a superstitious people were peculiarly interested: but do the annals of Herodotus and Livy contain even the slightest marks of any prescience respecting the present condition of the human race? Do they in a single instance afford a proof of the acquaintance of their respective authors with the condition of any part of mankind in these later ages? The ancient poets frequently broke forth in bold fallies of imagination: the ancient philosophers frequently indulged themselves in unrestrained speculations upon the possible combinations of human

From this fruitful, but ill-fated country, let him turn his attention to the deserts, by which it is partially surrounded: he will there see the tribes of wandering Arabs, preserving at this day the peculiar features of national character, with which, in the patriarchal age, it was predicted to the mother of Ishmael, the founder ^k of their race, while he was yet concealed in the womb, that his posterity should be distinguished. Though, in conformity with the promise of the angel, they have been multiplied almost beyond number: yet they have not adopted the customary forms of society, nor seized the favourable opportunities, which they have enjoyed, of advancement in civilization and refinement. They are still wild: their hand is still against every man, and every man's hand is against them.

Should he trace the Nile towards its source, and thence penetrate into the interior provinces of Africa, he will find the inhabitants of that quarter of the globe suffering at this day under the heavy curse

^k Genesis xvi. 10. 12.

has been my sincere and earnest desire to bring forward a series of such facts, and of such observations grounded upon facts, as appear peculiarly calculated to convince the serious and impartial enquirers of the divine origin of one of the principal evidences, by which our holy Religion is confirmed.

When the followers of Christ are required to assign a reasonable cause for their belief in the inspiration of the Prophets, they will not, it is presumed, appear either precipitate or injudicious in their decision, if they reply in the following terms. Being convinced of the public appearance of the several parts of the sacred Volume prior to the respective occurrences illustrative of the predictions, and perceiving an exact and striking coincidence between the prophecies and the events in which they were completed, we felt an earnest desire of knowing, whether this coincidence might not be the effect of imposture, of human sagacity, of enthusiasm, or of chance. Prosecuting our researches for this purpose, we have discovered, that the Prophets revealed events of the most distant times, that they fre-

brew Prophets, that his benevolent religion should be communicated to the Gentiles, and without any violent efforts, or any considerable addition of mortal aid, should eventually prevail among all the human race. The historian will inform him, that Christianity was little benefited in its auspicious propagation by the worldly power, or worldly wisdom of its most successful missionaries ; while his own eyes, wherever he may direct them, will convince him of the wonderful completion of the ancient Prophecies in the calling of the Gentiles, and the wide effusion of Christianity. He will view the religion of Jesus triumphant throughout all the nations of Europe ^m, the civilized parts of the immense continent of America, and the Indian islands of the West. Among the savage tribes, which occupy the woody and mountainous recesses of the new hemisphere, he will see it increasing the number of its converts, and extending its be-

^m Its present apparent extinction among the rulers of France may surely be considered as temporary, and seems not to require any qualification of the assertion, which I have made.

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as recorded in the Old Testament, is inexplicable upon any principles of human policy, and can only be reasonably accounted for upon the presumption of a divine agency:—that the means, which they employed, and the sublime object, which they pursued, together with the circumstances attending the opening and the final close of their supposed intercourse with the Deity, are peculiarly calculated to strengthen and confirm us in our belief of their real inspiration:—and, lastly, that in casting our eyes over the several parts of the human race, we discover the exact completion of many clear and important predictions, in the present condition of a great portion of the inhabitants of the globe. We consider all these circumstances taken collectively as exhibiting an accumulation of evidence, which amounts to a moral certainty; we are utterly unable to refuse it our unequivocal and absolute assent; and we therefore acknowledge the divine inspiration of the sacred Prophets.

When, in addition to these considerations, we reflect, that the foreknowledge of events, which depend upon the will of free agents

the eastern world still darkened with the smoke, which arose, when the bottomless pit was opened. Amidst the violent convulsions, which now agitate the kingdoms of Europe, he discerns, it may be, the awful accomplishment of the ancient Oracles of God. He beholds perhaps the tremendous operation of those means, which the Almighty in his wisdom may employ in hastening the ruin of that spiritual usurpation, of which the distinguishing features were delineated, and the certain subversion foretold: while through the states, in which its declining authority is still acknowledged, and its superstitious rites continue to be practised, is exhibited a visible, though faint representation of most of those enormous abuses, which were once permitted to threaten even the utter annihilation of genuine Christianity, and which are so strongly pourtrayed in the energetic descriptions of the Prophets.

When he has observed in the respective countries the accomplishment of various Prophecies, let him direct his most serious attention to an appearance singularly wonderful displayed in all countries, and realizing

ing one of the clearest, fullest, and most extraordinary predictions, which divine Wisdom has condescended to deliver. Let him examine the situation of the Jews. We have already seen, that it is in its nature miraculous; and that the numerous and striking peculiarities, by which it is distinguished, were clearly and forcibly foretold. The confirmation of those Prophecies in the Pentateuch, in Jeremiah, and in the Gospels, which relate to the present condition of that unhappy people, may be ascertained by the actual observations of the most common beholder in every kingdom of the globe. In Christian, in Mahometan, and in Pagan countries, the descendants of Abraham universally abound: and they afford almost as visible and decisive a testimony of the truth of Prophecy, as the creation and the government of the world afford of the wisdom and power of God.

Let the Sceptic contemplate with seriousness and impartiality all these remarkable circumstances in the present condition of mankind, with which the descriptions of the ancient Prophets thus accurately coincide.

incide. The reality of them does not depend upon opinion, which may fluctuate, or upon historical evidence, which may insidiously be represented as erroneous. They are objects of sense: they are facts submitted to his personal observation. They are considerable in number, and highly important in their nature. They are great features in the portrait of the human race. It may, perhaps, be justly asserted, that no period has occurred since the inspiration of the first Prophet, in which a larger portion of mankind, or a more extensive range of territory has been employed by the Almighty in fulfilling his revealed decrees.

When these considerations have been impressed upon his mind, and these facts submitted to his inspection, if he still hesitates, and is restrained by apprehensions of deception and imposture from yielding his entire assent, let him enquire, whether descriptive predictions of the present state of cities, kingdoms, and extensive portions of mankind, either similar, or bearing even the most distant resemblance, are evidently apparent, or can by the most forced constructions be made even plausibly to appear

pear in any other composition of antiquity. The Greeks and Romans boasted of numerous Oracles, which pretended to develope the future fortunes of individuals and of states: many of their vaunted predictions have descended to these later times: but do they contain a prophetic picture of any of the extraordinary characteristics, which distinguish the present generation? Have we not seen, that not one of their numerous priests even attempted to dispel the gloom, by which remote events are necessarily concealed from mortal knowledge? The most celebrated historians recorded innumerable prophecies, in which the passions of a superstitious people were peculiarly interested: but do the annals of Herodotus and Livy contain even the slightest marks of any prescience respecting the present condition of the human race? Do they in a single instance afford a proof of the acquaintance of their respective authors with the condition of any part of mankind in these later ages? The ancient poets frequently broke forth in bold fancies of imagination: the ancient philosophers frequently indulged themselves in unrestrained speculations upon the possible combinations of human

human society. But where is the philosopher, and where is the poet, in whose wildest fallies, or most licentious speculations, even a single clear and circumstantial description can be found applicable to the condition of any one part of the modern world?

From these observations it appears, that the prescience of such numerous and important characteristics of the present state of mankind is at once striking and unparalleled. The facts, by which it is illustrated and confirmed, being placed within our personal observation, are submitted to the evidence of our own senses. They are indeed of the nature of a miracle; and are admirably adapted to produce the same unalterable conviction of the interference of a supernatural Power, as would immediately result from a visible suspension of the regular order of the universe. . .

I have now proceeded through the several parts of the subject, which it has been my object in these Lectures to investigate. Through the whole of the discussion, I have cautiously endeavoured to restrain myself from indulging in hazardous conjectures. It

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has been my sincere and earnest desire to bring forward a series of such facts, and of such observations grounded upon facts, as appear peculiarly calculated to convince the serious and impartial enquirers of the divine origin of one of the principal evidences, by which our holy Religion is confirmed.

When the followers of Christ are required to assign a reasonable cause for their belief in the inspiration of the Prophets, they will not, it is presumed, appear either precipitate or injudicious in their decision, if they reply in the following terms. Being convinced of the public appearance of the several parts of the sacred Volume prior to the respective occurrences illustrative of the predictions, and perceiving an exact and striking coincidence between the prophecies and the events in which they were completed, we felt an earnest desire of knowing, whether this coincidence might not be the effect of imposture, of human sagacity, of enthusiasm, or of chance. Prosecuting our researches for this purpose, we have discovered, that the Prophets revealed events of the most distant times, that they fre-

frequently described the minute circumstances attending those events, that some of the peculiarities predicted were unexampled in the age of the Prophets, and that the predictions thus circumstantially detailed were very numerous:—that the occurrences foretold were often in the highest degree extraordinary or improbable, and sometimes even directly opposite to those, which, to a mere human speculator, must have appeared likely to take place:—that the subjects of the predictions were frequently hostile, and sometimes inevitably ruinous to the worldly interests of the Prophets; and, therefore, such as it is not conceivable that an impostor would have selected:—that the distinguishing characteristics of the Prophets and of their predictions, are peculiarly adapted to the design, for which Prophecy uniformly professed to have been given; and that the Prophets, if uninspired, appear to have been morally incapable of persevering uninterruptedly through so long a period, in the prosecution of so complicated a design, and of maintaining, with such nicety of discrimination, the propriety of the several parts:—that the conduct of the Prophets,

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as recorded in the Old Testament, is inexplicable upon any principles of human policy, and can only be reasonably accounted for upon the presumption of a divine agency :—that the means, which they employed, and the sublime object, which they pursued, together with the circumstances attending the opening and the final close of their supposed intercourse with the Deity, are peculiarly calculated to strengthen and confirm us in our belief of their real inspiration :—and, lastly, that in casting our eyes over the several parts of the human race, we discover the exact completion of many clear and important predictions, in the present condition of a great portion of the inhabitants of the globe. We consider all these circumstances taken collectively as exhibiting an accumulation of evidence, which amounts to a moral certainty ; we are utterly unable to refuse it our unequivocal and absolute assent ; and we therefore acknowledge the divine inspiration of the sacred Prophets.

When, in addition to these considerations, we reflect, that the foreknowledge of events, which depend upon the will of free agents

agents not yet in existence, evidently exceeds the powers of any finite being, whether angel or evil demon; that it is as manifest a display of supreme perfection as the creation and preservation of the universe; and that it can only be imparted to man by revelation from God himself, we feel ourselves most forcibly compelled to believe, that the wonderful foreknowledge, which is discovered in the sacred Writings, proceeded from the high and holy ministers, whom he, in his wisdom, inspired.

There is not a subject in theology more capable of imparting pleasure in the prosecution than that, which we have been invited to pursue in the course of these Lectures. It carries us back into past ages, and interests us in the most important transactions, which are recorded in the history of the human race. By the absolute certainty, which it affords of the interposition of the supreme Being in the affairs of the world, it is calculated to fill the mind with astonishment, and a kind of sacred delight. And when, in addition to these powerful considerations, we reflect, that it is one of the most effectual means of bringing the creature to a more perfect knowledge

ledge of the Creator, and of strengthening the confidence of mankind in divine revelation, we need not hesitate to pronounce it the most interesting and the most momentous, which can occupy the attention of a being, endued, like man, with reason, and formed for immortal life.

It has been asserted by the philosophic Infidel, that if the Almighty had really disclosed his will to mankind, the revelation would have been written in the heavens. Such is the contracted wisdom of the human mind. But that exalted Being, who only knoweth what is good for his creatures, in order to assist the imperfection of our nature, has given us a Revelation, not, like the affections, instinctively rising in the soul, not, like the great objects of creation, spontaneously exposed every moment to the senses, but dependent upon the exercise of our understanding, and supplying fresh means of conviction at every repetition of our enquiries. He foresaw, that even his divinest gift to man, if presenting itself to his infant faculties, and perpetually self apparent through his whole existence, might lose a considerable part of its possible influence over his heart, and fall into neglect.

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or diffuse. But that truth, which the diligence of men alone can fully discover, and which displays more visible marks of its divine origin at every renewal of their researches, is peculiarly adapted to operate effectually upon the understanding, to produce a continued assent to its dictates, and finally to acquire an absolute dominion over the heart. Of all the evidences, by which Christianity is supported, that of Prophecy most abundantly possesses this quality. When we have entered upon our examination of this evidence, the exalted character of our Religion begins to brighten on the view; continually shines forth with fresh acquisitions of lustre; and at length appears in all the glow and splendour of its divine nature. For when we thus behold, in multiplied instances, a clear and ample display of that stupendous foreknowledge, which can only be possessed by the great Maker and Ruler of the universe; the truth of Revelation does in reality appear as manifest and striking, as if it were inscribed in characters of light on the wide expanse of Heaven.

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